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 Dursley s 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, 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 swooping 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.

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 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?"

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 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 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 You-Know-Who

seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found

out about us all. I suppose he 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

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

Potters' 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."

"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! Can't 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 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, sir," 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. "Hell 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 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'd best

get this bike away. 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.

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!"

THE VANASHIG 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 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 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?"

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 Tibbies,

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.

"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 cars 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 mothers 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 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.

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 DONT 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.

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."

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 WONT 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?" "

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 burning 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 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.

3

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, 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.

k k k

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."

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, 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.

"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.

"I 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.

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."

"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 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.

The repaired alarm clock rang at six o'clock the next

morning. Harry turned it off quickly and dressed

silently. He mustn't wake the Dursleys. He stole

downstairs without turning on any of the lights.

He was going to wait for the postman on the corner of

Privet Drive and get the letters for number four first.

His heart hammered as he crept across the dark hall

toward the front door -

"AAAAARRRGH ! "

Harry leapt into the air; he'd trodden on something

big and squashy on the doormat - something alive\

Lights clicked on upstairs and to his horror Harry

realized that the big, squashy something had been his

uncle's face. Uncle Vernon had been lying at the foot

of the front door in a sleeping bag, clearly making

sure that Harry didn't do exactly what he'd been

trying to do. He shouted at Harry for about half an

hour and then told him to go and make a cup of tea.

Harry shuffled miserably off into the kitchen and by

the time he got back, the mail had arrived, right into

Uncle Vernon's lap. Harry could see three letters

addressed in green ink.

"I want - " he began, but Uncle Vernon was tearing

the letters into pieces before his eyes.

Uncle Vernon didn't go to work that day. He stayed at

home and nailed up the mail slot.

"See," he explained to Aunt Petunia through a

mouthful of nails, "if they can't deliver them they'll

just give up."

"I'm not sure that'll work, Vernon."

"Oh, these peoples minds work in strange ways,

Petunia, they're not like you and me," said Uncle

Vernon, trying to knock in a nail with the piece of

fruitcake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

On Friday, no less than twelve letters arrived for

Harry. As they couldn't go through the mail slot they

had been pushed under the door, slotted through the

sides, and a few even forced through the small

window in the downstairs bathroom.

Uncle Vernon stayed at home again. After burning all

the letters, he got out a hammer and nails and

boarded up the cracks around the front and back

doors so no one could go out. He hummed "Tiptoe

Through the Tulips" as he worked, and jumped at

small noises.

On Saturday, things began to get out of hand.

Twenty-four letters to Harry found their way into the

house, rolled up and hidden inside each of the two

dozen eggs that their very confused milkman had

handed Aunt Petunia through the living room

window. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone

calls to the post office and the dairy trying to find

someone to complain to, Aunt Petunia shredded the

letters in her food processor.

"Who on earth wants to talk to you this badly?"

Dudley asked Harry in amazement.

•k k k

On Sunday morning, Uncle Vernon sat down at the

breakfast table looking tired and rather ill, but happy.

"No post on Sundays," he reminded them cheerfully

as he spread marmalade on his newspapers, "no

damn letters today - "

Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney

as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of

the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters came

pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys

ducked, but Harry leapt into the air trying to catch

one -

"Out! OUT!"

Uncle Vernon seized Harry around the waist and

threw him into the hall. When Aunt Petunia and

Dudley had run out with their arms over their faces,

Uncle Vernon slammed the door shut. They could

hear the letters still streaming into the room,

bouncing off the walls and floor.

"That does it," said Uncle Vernon, trying to speak

calmly but pulling great tufts out of his mustache at

the same time. "I want you all back here in five

minutes ready to leave. We're going away. Just pack

some clothes. No arguments!"

He looked so dangerous with half his mustache

missing that no one dared argue. Ten minutes later

they had wrenched their way through the boarded-up

doors and were in the car, speeding toward the

highway. Dudley was sniffling in the back seat; his

father had hit him round the head for holding them

up while he tried to pack his television, VCR, and

computer in his sports bag.

They drove. And they drove. Even Aunt Petunia didn't

dare ask where they were going. Every now and then

Uncle Vernon would take a sharp turn and drive in

the opposite direction for a while.

"Shake 'em off ... shake 'em off," he would mutter

whenever he did this.

They didn't stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall

Dudley was howling. He'd never had such a bad day

in his life. He was hungry, he'd missed five television

programs he'd wanted to see, and he'd never gone so

long without blowing up an alien on his computer.

Uncle Vernon stopped at last outside a gloomy-

looking hotel on the outskirts of a big city. Dudley

and Harry shared a room with twin beds and damp,

musty sheets. Dudley snored but Harry stayed awake,

sitting on the windowsill, staring down at the lights of

passing cars and wondering...

They ate stale cornflakes and cold tinned tomatoes on

toast for breakfast the next day. They had just

finished when the owner of the hotel came over to

their table.

" 'Scuse me, but is one of you Mr. H. Potter? Only I

got about an 'undred of these at the front desk."

She held up a letter so they could read the green ink

address:

Mr. H. Potter

Room 1 7

Railview Hotel

Cokeworth

Harry made a grab for the letter but Uncle Vernon

knocked his hand out of the way. The woman stared.

"I'll take them," said Uncle Vernon, standing up

quickly and following her from the dining room.

•k k k

"Wouldn't it be better just to go home, dear?" Aunt

Petunia suggested timidly, hours later, but Uncle

Vernon didn't seem to hear her. Exactly what he was

looking for, none of them knew. He drove them into

the middle of a forest, got out, looked around, shook

his head, got back in the car, and off they went again.

The same thing happened in the middle of a plowed

field, halfway across a suspension bridge, and at the

top of a multilevel parking garage.

"Daddy's gone mad, hasn't he?" Dudley asked Aunt

Petunia dully late that afternoon. Uncle Vernon had

parked at the coast, locked them all inside the car,

and disappeared.

It started to rain. Great drops beat on the roof of the

car. Dudley sniveled.

"It's Monday," he told his mother. "The Great

Humberto's on tonight. I want to stay somewhere with

a television."

Monday. This reminded Harry of something. If it was

Monday - and you could usually count on Dudley to

know the days of the week, because of television -

then tomorrow, Tuesday, was Harry's eleventh

birthday. Of course, his birthdays were never exactly

fun - last year, the Dursleys had given him a coat

hanger and a pair of Uncle Vernon's old socks. Still,

you weren't eleven every day.

Uncle Vernon was back and he was smiling. He was

also carrying a long, thin package and didn't answer

Aunt Petunia when she asked what he'd bought.

"Found the perfect place!" he said. "Come on!

Everyone out!"

It was very cold outside the car. Uncle Vernon was

pointing at what looked like a large rock way out at

sea. Perched on top of the rock was the most

miserable little shack you could imagine. One thing

was certain, there was no television in there.

"Storm forecast for tonight!" said Uncle Vernon

gleefully, clapping his hands together. "And this

gentleman's kindly agreed to lend us his boat!"

A toothless old man came ambling up to them,

pointing, with a rather wicked grin, at an old rowboat

bobbing in the iron-gray water below them.

"I've already got us some rations," said Uncle Vernon,

"so all aboard!"

It was freezing in the boat. Icy sea spray and rain

crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped

their faces. After what seemed like hours they

reached the rock, where Uncle Vernon, slipping and

sliding, led the way to the broken-down house.

The inside was horrible; it smelled strongly of

seaweed, the wind whistled through the gaps in the

wooden walls, and the fireplace was damp and empty.

There were only two rooms.

Uncle Vernon's rations turned out to be a bag of chips

each and four bananas. He tried to start a fire but the

empty chip bags just smoked and shriveled up.

"Could do with some of those letters now, eh?" he said

cheerfully.

He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought

nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a

storm to deliver mail. Harry privately agreed, though

the thought didn't cheer him up at all.

As night fell, the promised storm blew up around

them. Spray from the high waves splattered the walls

of the hut and a fierce wind rattled the filthy

windows. Aunt Petunia found a few moldy blankets in

the second room and made up a bed for Dudley on

the moth-eaten sofa. She and Uncle Vernon went off

to the lumpy bed next door, and Harry was left to find

the softest bit of floor he could and to curl up under

the thinnest, most ragged blanket.

The storm raged more and more ferociously as the

night went on. Harry couldn't sleep. He shivered and

turned over, trying to get comfortable, his stomach

rumbling with hunger. Dudley's snores were drowned

by the low rolls of thunder that started near midnight.

The lighted dial of Dudley's watch, which was

dangling over the edge of the sofa on his fat wrist, told

Harry he'd be eleven in ten minutes' time. He lay and

watched his birthday tick nearer, wondering if the

Dursleys would remember at all, wondering where the

letter writer was now.

Five minutes to go. Harry heard something creak

outside. He hoped the roof wasn't going to fall in,

although he might be warmer if it did. Four minutes

to go. Maybe the house in Privet Drive would be so

full of letters when they got back that he'd be able to

steal one somehow.

Three minutes to go. Was that the sea, slapping hard

on the rock like that? And (two minutes to go) what

was that funny crunching noise? Was the rock

crumbling into the sea?

One minute to go and he'd be eleven. Thirty seconds

... twenty ... ten ... nine - maybe he'd wake Dudley

up, just to annoy him - three ... two ... one ...

BOOM.

The whole shack shivered and Harry sat bolt upright,

staring at the door. Someone was outside, knocking

to come in.

THE KEEPER OF THE KEYS

BOOM. They knocked again. Dudley jerked awake.

"Where's the cannon?" he said stupidly.

There was a crash behind them and Uncle Vernon

came skidding into the room. He was holding a rifle in

his hands - now they knew what had been in the

long, thin package he had brought with them.

"Who's there?" he shouted. "I warn you - I'm armed!"

There was a pause. Then -

SMASH!

The door was hit with such force that it swung clean

off its hinges and with a deafening crash landed flat

on the floor.

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His

face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy

mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could

make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under

all the hair.

The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so

that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down,

picked up the door, and fitted it easily back into its

frame. The noise of the storm outside dropped a little.

He turned to look at them all.

"Couldn't make us a cup o' tea, could yeh? It's not

been an easy journey. ..."

He strode over to the sofa where Dudley sat frozen

with fear.

"Budge up, yeh great lump," said the stranger.

Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind his mother,

who was crouching, terrified, behind Uncle Vernon.

"An' here's Harry!" said the giant.

Harry looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face

and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile.

"Las' time I saw you, you was only a baby," said the

giant. "Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh've got yer

mom's eyes."

Uncle Vernon made a funny rasping noise.

"I demand that you leave at once, sir!" he said. "You

are breaking and entering!"

"Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune," said the

giant; he reached over the back of the sofa, jerked the

gun out of Uncle Vernon's hands, bent it into a knot

as easily as if it had been made of rubber, and threw

it into a corner of the room.

Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a

mouse being trodden on.

"Anyway - Harry," said the giant, turning his back

on the Dursleys, "a very happy birthday to yeh. Got

summat fer yeh here - I mighta sat on it at some

point, but it'll taste all right."

From an inside pocket of his black overcoat he pulled

a slightly squashed box. Harry opened it with

trembling fingers. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate

cake with Happy Birthday Harry written on it in green

icing.

Harry looked up at the giant. He meant to say thank

you, but the words got lost on the way to his mouth,

and what he said instead was, "Who are you?"

The giant chuckled.

"True, I haven't introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid,

Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts."

He held out an enormous hand and shook Harry's

whole arm.

"What about that tea then, eh?" he said, rubbing his

hands together. "I'd not say no ter summat stronger if

yeh've got it, mind."

His eyes fell on the empty grate with the shriveled

chip bags in it and he snorted. He bent down over the

fireplace; they couldn't see what he was doing but

when he drew back a second later, there was a

roaring fire there. It filled the whole damp hut with

flickering light and Harry felt the warmth wash over

him as though he'd sunk into a hot bath.

The giant sat back down on the sofa, which sagged

under his weight, and began taking all sorts of things

out of the pockets of his coat: a copper kettle, a

squashy package of sausages, a poker, a teapot,

several chipped mugs, and a bottle of some amber

liquid that he took a swig from before starting to

make tea. Soon the hut was full of the sound and

smell of sizzling sausage. Nobody said a thing while

the giant was working, but as he slid the first six fat,

juicy, slightly burnt sausages from the poker, Dudley

fidgeted a little. Uncle Vernon said sharply, "Don't

touch anything he gives you, Dudley."

The giant chuckled darkly.

"Yer great puddin' of a son don' need fattenin'

anymore, Dursley, don' worry."

He passed the sausages to Harry, who was so hungry

he had never tasted anything so wonderful, but he

still couldn't take his eyes off the giant. Finally, as

nobody seemed about to explain anything, he said,

"I'm sorry, but I still don't really know who you are."

The giant took a gulp of tea and wiped his mouth with

the back of his hand.

"Call me Hagrid," he said, "everyone does. An' like I

told yeh, I'm Keeper of Keys at Hogwarts - yeh'll

know all about Hogwarts, o' course."

"Er - no," said Harry.

Hagrid looked shocked.

"Sorry," Harry said quickly.

"Sorry?" barked Hagrid, turning to stare at the

Dursleys, who shrank back into the shadows. "It's

them as should be sorry! I knew yeh weren't gettin'

yer letters but I never thought yeh wouldn't even

know abou' Hogwarts, fer cryin' out loud! Did yeh

never wonder where yer parents learned it all?"

"All what?" asked Harry.

"ALL WHAT?" Hagrid thundered. "Now wait jus' one

second!"

He had leapt to his feet. In his anger he seemed to fill

the whole hut. The Dursleys were cowering against

the wall.

"Do you mean ter tell me," he growled at the Dursleys,

"that this boy - this boy! - knows nothin' abou' -

about ANYTHING?"

Harry thought this was going a bit far. He had been to

school, after all, and his marks weren't bad.

"I know some things," he said. "I can, you know, do

math and stuff."

But Hagrid simply waved his hand and said, "About

our world, I mean. Your world. My world. Yer parents'

world."

"What world?"

Hagrid looked as if he was about to explode.

"DURSLEY!" he boomed.

Uncle Vernon, who had gone very pale, whispered

something that sounded like "Mimblewimble." Hagrid

stared wildly at Harry.

"But yeh must know about yer mom and dad," he

said. "I mean, they're famous. You're famous."

"What? My - my mom and dad weren't famous, were

they?"

"Yeh don' know ... yeh don' know ..." Hagrid ran his

fingers through his hair, fixing Harry with a

bewildered stare.

"Yeh don' know what yeh are?" he said finally.

Uncle Vernon suddenly found his voice.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Stop right there, sir! I forbid

you to tell the boy anything!"

A braver man than Vernon Dursley would have

quailed under the furious look Hagrid now gave him;

when Hagrid spoke, his every syllable trembled with

rage.

"You never told him? Never told him what was in the

letter Dumbledore left fer him? I was there! I saw

Dumbledore leave it, Dursley! An' you've kept it from

him all these years?"

"Kept what from me?" said Harry eagerly.

"STOP! I FORBID YOU!" yelled Uncle Vernon in panic.

Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

"Ah, go boil yer heads, both of yeh," said Hagrid.

"Harry - yer a wizard."

There was silence inside the hut. Only the sea and

the whistling wind could be heard.

"I'm a what?" gasped Harry.

"A wizard, o' course," said Hagrid, sitting back down

on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, "an'

a thumpin' good'un, I'd say, once yeh've been trained

up a bit. With a mum an' dad like yours, what else

would yeh be? An' I reckon it's abou' time yeh read

yer letter."

Harry stretched out his hand at last to take the

yellowish envelope, addressed in emerald green to Mr.

H. Potter, The Floor, Hut-on-the-Rock, The Sea. He

pulled out the letter and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL

o/WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

Headmaster: ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sore., Chf.

Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of

Wizards)

Dear Mr. Potter,

We are pleased to inform you that you have been

accepted at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and

Wizardry. Please find enclosed a list of all necessary

books and equipment.

Term begins on September 1. We await your owl by no

later than July 31.

Yours sincerely,

Minerva McGonagall,

Deputy Headmistress

Questions exploded inside Harry's head like fireworks

and he couldn't decide which to ask first. After a few

minutes he stammered, "What does it mean, they

await my owl?"

"Gallopin' Gorgons, that reminds me," said Hagrid,

clapping a hand to his forehead with enough force to

knock over a cart horse, and from yet another pocket

inside his overcoat he pulled an owl - a real, live,

rather ruffled-looking owl - a long quill, and a roll of

parchment. With his tongue between his teeth he

scribbled a note that Harry could read upside down:

Dear Professor Dumbledore,

Given Harry his letter.

Taking him to buy his things tomorrow.

Weather's horrible. Hope you're well.

Hagrid

Hagrid rolled up the note, gave it to the owl, which

clamped it in its beak, went to the door, and threw

the owl out into the storm. Then he came back and

sat down as though this was as normal as talking on

the telephone.

Harry realized his mouth was open and closed it

quickly.

"Where was I?" said Hagrid, but at that moment,

Uncle Vernon, still ashen-faced but looking very

angry, moved into the firelight.

"He's not going," he said.

Hagrid grunted.

"I'd like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him," he

said.

"A what?" said Harry, interested.

"A Muggle," said Hagrid, "it's what we call nonmagic

folk like them. An' it's your bad luck you grew up in a

family o' the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on."

"We swore when we took him in we'd put a stop to

that rubbish," said Uncle Vernon, "swore we'd stamp

it out of him! Wizard indeed!"

"You knew?" said Harry. "You knew I'm a - a

wizard?"

"Knew!" shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. "Knew\ Of

course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted

sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just

like that and disappeared off to that - that school -

and came home every vacation with her pockets full

of frog spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the

only one who saw her for what she was - a freak!

But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this

and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in

the family!"

She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went

ranting on. It seemed she had been wanting to say all

this for years.

"Then she met that Potter at school and they left and

got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd

be just the same, just as strange, just as - as -

abnormal - and then, if you please, she went and got

herself blown up and we got landed with you!"

Harry had gone very white. As soon as he found his

voice he said, "Blown up? You told me they died in a

car crash!"

"CAR CRASH!" roared Hagrid, jumping up so angrily

that the Dursleys scuttled back to their corner. "How

could a car crash kill Lily an' James Potter? It's an

outrage! A scandal! Harry Potter not knowin' his own

story when every kid in our world knows his name!"

"But why? What happened?" Harry asked urgently.

The anger faded from Hagrid's face. He looked

suddenly anxious.

"I never expected this," he said, in a low, worried

voice. "I had no idea, when Dumbledore told me there

might be trouble gettin' hold of yeh, how much yeh

didn't know. Ah, Harry, I don' know if I'm the right

person ter tell yeh - but someone's gotta - yeh can't

go off ter Hogwarts not knowin'."

He threw a dirty look at the Dursleys.

"Well, it's best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh -

mind, I can't tell yeh everythin', it's a great myst'ry,

parts of it. ..."

He sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds,

and then said, "It begins, I suppose, with - with a

person called - but it's incredible yeh don't know his

name, everyone in our world knows - "

"Who?"

"Well - I don' like sayin' the name if I can help it. No

one does."

"Why not?"

"Gulpin' gargoyles, Harry, people are still scared.

Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizard

who went ... bad. As bad as you could go. Worse.

Worse than worse. His name was ..."

Hagrid gulped, but no words came out.

"Could you write it down?" Harry suggested.

"Nah - can't spell it. All right - Voldemort." Hagrid

shuddered. "Don' make me say it again. Anyway, this

- this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started

lookin' fer followers. Got 'em, too - some were afraid,

some just wanted a bit o' his power, 'cause he was

gettin' himself power, all right. Dark days, Harry.

Didn't know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly

with strange wizards or witches . . . terrible things

happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up

to him - an' he killed 'em. Horribly. One o' the only

safe places left was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's

the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare

try takin' the school, not jus' then, anyway.

"Now, yer mum an' dad were as good a witch an'

wizard as I ever knew. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts

in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-

Who never tried to get 'em on his side before . . .

probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter

want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side.

"Maybe he thought he could persuade 'em ... maybe

he just wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows

is, he turned up in the village where you was all

living, on Halloween ten years ago. You was just a

year old. He came ter yer house an' - an' - "

Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted

handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a

foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad - knew yer mum

an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find - anyway

"You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then - an' this is the

real myst'ry of the thing - he tried to kill you, too.

Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or

maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do

it. Never wondered how you got that mark on yer

forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what yeh

get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh - took

care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even - but it

didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry.

No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one

except you, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches

an' wizards of the age - the McKinnons, the Bones,

the Prewetts - an' you was only a baby, an' you

lived."

Something very painful was going on in Harry's mind.

As Hagrid's story came to a close, he saw again the

blinding flash of green light, more clearly than he had

ever remembered it before - and he remembered

something else, for the first time in his life: a high,

cold, cruel laugh.

Hagrid was watching him sadly.

"Took yeh from the ruined house myself, on

Dumbledore's orders. Brought yeh ter this lot ..."

"Load of old tosh," said Uncle Vernon. Harry jumped;

he had almost forgotten that the Dursleys were there.

Uncle Vernon certainly seemed to have got back his

courage. He was glaring at Hagrid and his fists were

clenched.

"Now, you listen here, boy," he snarled, "I accept

there's something strange about you, probably

nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured - and as

for all this about your parents, well, they were

weirdos, no denying it, and the world's better off

without them in my opinion - asked for all they got,

getting mixed up with these wizarding types - just

what I expected, always knew they'd come to a sticky

end - "

But at that moment, Hagrid leapt from the sofa and

drew a battered pink umbrella from inside his coat.

Pointing this at Uncle Vernon like a sword, he said,

"I'm warning you, Dursley - I'm warning you - one

more word ..."

In danger of being speared on the end of an umbrella

by a bearded giant, Uncle Vernon's courage failed

again; he flattened himself against the wall and fell

silent.

"That's better," said Hagrid, breathing heavily and

sitting back down on the sofa, which this time sagged

right down to the floor.

Harry, meanwhile, still had questions to ask,

hundreds of them.

"But what happened to Vol-, sorry - I mean, You-

Know-Who?"

"Good question, Harry. Disappeared. Vanished. Same

night he tried ter kill you. Makes yeh even more

famous. That's the biggest myst'ry, see ... he was

gettin' more an' more powerful - why'd he go?

"Some say he died. Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno

if he had enough human left in him to die. Some say

he's still out there, bidin' his time, like, but I don'

believe it. People who was on his side came back ter

ours. Some of 'em came outta kinda trances. Don'

reckon they could've done if he was cornin' back.

"Most of us reckon he's still out there somewhere but

lost his powers. Too weak to carry on. 'Cause

somethin' about you finished him, Harry. There was

somethin' goin' on that night he hadn't counted on -

/ dunno what it was, no one does - but somethin'

about you stumped him, all right."

Hagrid looked at Harry with warmth and respect

blazing in his eyes, but Harry, instead of feeling

pleased and proud, felt quite sure there had been a

horrible mistake. A wizard? Him? How could he

possibly be? He'd spent his life being clouted by

Dudley, and bullied by Aunt Petunia and Uncle

Vernon; if he was really a wizard, why hadn't they

been turned into warty toads every time they'd tried

to lock him in his cupboard? If he'd once defeated the

greatest sorcerer in the world, how come Dudley had

always been able to kick him around like a football?

"Hagrid," he said quietly, "I think you must have

made a mistake. I don't think I can be a wizard."

To his surprise, Hagrid chuckled.

"Not a wizard, eh? Never made things happen when

you was scared or angry?"

Harry looked into the fire. Now he came to think

about it . . . every odd thing that had ever made his

aunt and uncle furious with him had happened when

he, Harry, had been upset or angry ... chased by

Dudley's gang, he had somehow found himself out of

their reach . . . dreading going to school with that

ridiculous haircut, he'd managed to make it grow

back . . . and the very last time Dudley had hit him,

hadn't he got his revenge, without even realizing he

was doing it? Hadn't he set a boa constrictor on him?

Harry looked back at Hagrid, smiling, and saw that

Hagrid was positively beaming at him.

"See?" said Hagrid. "Harry Potter, not a wizard - you

wait, you'll be right famous at Hogwarts."

But Uncle Vernon wasn't going to give in without a

fight.

"Haven't I told you he's not going?" he hissed. "He's

going to Stonewall High and he'll be grateful for it. I've

read those letters and he needs all sorts of rubbish -

spell books and wands and - "

"If he wants ter go, a great Muggle like you won't stop

him," growled Hagrid. "Stop Lily an' James Potter's

son goin' ter Hogwarts! Yer mad. His name's been

down ever since he was born. He's off ter the finest

school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. Seven

years there and he won't know himself. He'll be with

youngsters of his own sort, fer a change, an' he'll be

under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had,

Albus Dumbled - "

"I AM NOT PAYING FOR SOME CRACKPOT OLD

FOOL TO TEACH HIM MAGIC TRICKS!" yelled Uncle

Vernon.

But he had finally gone too far. Hagrid seized his

umbrella and whirled it over his head, "NEVER - " he

thundered, "- INSULT - ALBUS - DUMBLEDORE

- IN - FRONT - OF - ME!"

He brought the umbrella swishing down through the

air to point at Dudley - there was a flash of violet

light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp squeal, and

the next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with

his hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in

pain. When he turned his back on them, Harry saw a

curly pig's tail poking through a hole in his trousers.

Uncle Vernon roared. Pulling Aunt Petunia and

Dudley into the other room, he cast one last terrified

look at Hagrid and slammed the door behind them.

Hagrid looked down at his umbrella and stroked his

beard.

"Shouldn'ta lost me temper," he said ruefully, "but it

didn't work anyway. Meant ter turn him into a pig,

but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there

wasn't much left ter do."

He cast a sideways look at Harry under his bushy

eyebrows.

"Be grateful if yeh didn't mention that ter anyone at

Hogwarts," he said. "I'm - er - not supposed ter do

magic, strictly speakin'. I was allowed ter do a bit ter

follow yeh an' get yer letters to yeh an' stuff - one o'

the reasons I was so keen ter take on the job - "

"Why aren't you supposed to do magic?" asked Harry.

"Oh, well - I was at Hogwarts meself but I - er -

got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year.

They snapped me wand in half an' everything. But

Dumbledore let me stay on as gamekeeper. Great

man, Dumbledore."

"Why were you expelled?"

"It's gettin' late and we've got lots ter do tomorrow,"

said Hagrid loudly. "Gotta get up ter town, get all yer

books an' that."

He took off his thick black coat and threw it to Harry.

"You can kip under that," he said. "Don' mind if it

wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o' dormice in

one o' the pockets."

DIAGON ALLY

Harry woke early the next morning. Although he

could tell it was daylight, he kept his eyes shut tight.

"It was a dream," he told himself firmly. "I dreamed a

giant called Hagrid came to tell me I was going to a

school for wizards. When I open my eyes I'll be at

home in my cupboard."

There was suddenly a loud tapping noise.

And there's Aunt Petunia knocking on the door, Harry

thought, his heart sinking. But he still didn't open his

eyes. It had been such a good dream.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

"All right," Harry mumbled, "I'm getting up."

He sat up and Hagrid 's heavy coat fell off him. The

hut was full of sunlight, the storm was over, Hagrid

himself was asleep on the collapsed sofa, and there

was an owl rapping its claw on the window, a

newspaper held in its beak.

Harry scrambled to his feet, so happy he felt as

though a large balloon was swelling inside him. He

went straight to the window and jerked it open. The

owl swooped in and dropped the newspaper on top of

Hagrid, who didn't wake up. The owl then fluttered

onto the floor and began to attack Hagrid 's coat.

"Don't do that."

Harry tried to wave the owl out of the way, but it

snapped its beak fiercely at him and carried on

savaging the coat.

"Hagrid!" said Harry loudly. "There's an owl - "

"Pay him," Hagrid grunted into the sofa.

"What?"

"He wants payin' fer deliverin' the paper. Look in the

pockets."

Hagrid 's coat seemed to be made of nothing but

pockets - bunches of keys, slug pellets, balls of

string, peppermint humbugs, teabags ... finally, Harry

pulled out a handful of strange-looking coins.

"Give him five Knuts," said Hagrid sleepily.

"Knuts?"

"The little bronze ones."

Harry counted out five little bronze coins, and the owl

held out his leg so Harry could put the money into a

small leather pouch tied to it. Then he flew off

through the open window.

Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up, and stretched.

"Best be off, Harry, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter

London an' buy all yer stuff fer school."

Harry was turning over the wizard coins and looking

at them. He had just thought of something that made

him feel as though the happy balloon inside him had

got a puncture.

"Urn - Hagrid?"

"Mm?" said Hagrid, who was pulling on his huge

boots.

"I haven't got any money - and you heard Uncle

Vernon last night ... he won't pay for me to go and

learn magic."

"Don't worry about that," said Hagrid, standing up

and scratching his head. "D'yeh think yer parents

didn't leave yeh anything?"

"But if their house was destroyed - "

"They didn' keep their gold in the house, boy! Nah,

first stop fer us is Gringotts. Wizards' bank. Have a

sausage, they're not bad cold - an' I wouldn' say no

teh a bit o' yer birthday cake, neither."

"Wizards have banks?"

"Just the one. Gringotts. Run by goblins."

Harry dropped the bit of sausage he was holding.

"Goblins?"

"Yeah - so yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it, I'll tell yeh

that. Never mess with goblins, Harry. Gringotts is the

safest place in the world fer anything yeh want ter

keep safe - 'cept maybe Hogwarts. As a matter o'

fact, I gotta visit Gringotts anyway Fer Dumbledore.

Hogwarts business." Hagrid drew himself up proudly.

"He usually gets me ter do important stuff fer him.

Fetchin' you - gettin' things from Gringotts - knows

he can trust me, see.

"Got everythin'? Come on, then."

Harry followed Hagrid out onto the rock. The sky was

quite clear now and the sea gleamed in the sunlight.

The boat Uncle Vernon had hired was still there, with

a lot of water in the bottom after the storm.

"How did you get here?" Harry asked, looking around

for another boat.

"Flew," said Hagrid.

"Flew?"

"Yeah - but we'll go back in this. Not s'pposed ter

use magic now I've got yeh."

They settled down in the boat, Harry still staring at

Hagrid, trying to imagine him flying.

"Seems a shame ter row, though," said Hagrid, giving

Harry another of his sideways looks. "If I was ter - er

- speed things up a bit, would yeh mind not

mentionin' it at Hogwarts?"

"Of course not," said Harry, eager to see more magic.

Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again, tapped it

twice on the side of the boat, and they sped off toward

land.

"Why would you be mad to try and rob Gringotts?"

Harry asked.

"Spells - enchantments," said Hagrid, unfolding his

newspaper as he spoke. "They say there's dragons

guardin' the high-security vaults. And then yeh gotta

find yer way - Gringotts is hundreds of miles under

London, see. Deep under the Underground. Yeh'd die

of hunger tryin' ter get out, even if yeh did manage ter

get yer hands on summat."

Harry sat and thought about this while Hagrid read

his newspaper, the Daily Prophet Harry had learned

from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone

while they did this, but it was very difficult, he'd

never had so many questions in his life.

"Ministry o' Magic messin' things up as usual," Hagrid

muttered, turning the page.

"There's a Ministry of Magic?" Harry asked, before he

could stop himself.

" 'Course," said Hagrid. "They wanted Dumbledore fer

Minister, o' course, but he'd never leave Hogwarts, so

old Cornelius Fudge got the job. Bungler if ever there

was one. So he pelts Dumbledore with owls every

morning, askin' fer advice."

"But what does a Ministry of Magic do?"

"Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles

that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the

country."

"Why?"

"Why? Blimey, Harry, everyone 'd be wantin' magic

solutions to their problems. Nah, we're best left

alone."

At this moment the boat bumped gently into the

harbor wall. Hagrid folded up his newspaper, and

they clambered up the stone steps onto the street.

Passersby stared a lot at Hagrid as they walked

through the little town to the station. Harry couldn't

blame them. Not only was Hagrid twice as tall as

anyone else, he kept pointing at perfectly ordinary

things like parking meters and saying loudly, "See

that, Harry? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?"

"Hagrid," said Harry, panting a bit as he ran to keep

up, "did you say there are dragons at Gringotts?"

"Well, so they say," said Hagrid. "Crikey, I'd like a

dragon."

"You'd like one?"

"Wanted one ever since I was a kid - here we go."

They had reached the station. There was a train to

London in five minutes' time. Hagrid, who didn't

understand "Muggle money," as he called it, gave the

bills to Harry so he could buy their tickets.

People stared more than ever on the train. Hagrid

took up two seats and sat knitting what looked like a

canary-yellow circus tent.

"Still got yer letter, Harry?" he asked as he counted

stitches.

Harry took the parchment envelope out of his pocket.

"Good," said Hagrid. "There's a list there of everything

yeh need."

Harry unfolded a second piece of paper he hadn't

noticed the night before, and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL

o/WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

UNIFORM

First-year students will require:

1 . Three sets of plain work robes (black)

2. One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear

3. One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or

similar)

4. One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name

tags

COURSE BOOKS

All students should have a copy of each of the

following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda

Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginners' Guide to Transfiguration by Emeric

Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida

Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt

Scamander

The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection by Quentin

Trimble

OTHER EQUIPMENT

1 wand

1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)

1 set glass or crystal phials

1 telescope

1 set brass scales

Students may also bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad

PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST YEARS ARE

NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS

"Can we buy all this in London?" Harry wondered

aloud.

"If yeh know where to go," said Hagrid.

Harry had never been to London before. Although

Hagrid seemed to know where he was going, he was

obviously not used to getting there in an ordinary

way. He got stuck in the ticket barrier on the

Underground, and complained loudly that the seats

were too small and the trains too slow.

"I don't know how the Muggles manage without

magic," he said as they climbed a broken-down

escalator that led up to a bustling road lined with

shops.

Hagrid was so huge that he parted the crowd easily;

all Harry had to do was keep close behind him. They

passed book shops and music stores, hamburger

restaurants and cinemas, but nowhere that looked as

if it could sell you a magic wand. This was just an

ordinary street full of ordinary people. Could there

really be piles of wizard gold buried miles beneath

them? Were there really shops that sold spell books

and broomsticks? Might this not all be some huge

joke that the Dursleys had cooked up? If Harry hadn't

known that the Dursleys had no sense of humor, he

might have thought so; yet somehow, even though

everything Hagrid had told him so far was

unbelievable, Harry couldn't help trusting him.

"This is it," said Hagrid, coming to a halt, "the Leaky

Cauldron. It's a famous place."

It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. If Hagrid hadn't

pointed it out, Harry wouldn't have noticed it was

there. The people hurrying by didn't glance at it. Their

eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the

record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the

Leaky Cauldron at all. In fact, Harry had the most

peculiar feeling that only he and Hagrid could see it.

Before he could mention this, Hagrid had steered him

inside.

For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby. A

few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny

glasses of sherry. One of them was smoking a long

pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old

bartender, who was quite bald and looked like a

toothless walnut. The low buzz of chatter stopped

when they walked in. Everyone seemed to know

Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the

bartender reached for a glass, saying, "The usual,

Hagrid?"

"Can't, Tom, I'm on Hogwarts business," said Hagrid,

clapping his great hand on Harry's shoulder and

making Harry's knees buckle.

"Good Lord," said the bartender, peering at Harry, "is

this - can this be - ?"

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely

still and silent.

"Bless my soul," whispered the old bartender, "Harry

Potter ... what an honor."

He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed toward

Harry and seized his hand, tears in his eyes.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter, welcome back."

Harry didn't know what to say. Everyone was looking

at him. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it

without realizing it had gone out. Hagrid was

beaming.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and the

next moment, Harry found himself shaking hands

with everyone in the Leaky Cauldron.

"Doris Crockford, Mr. Potter, can't believe I'm meeting

you at last."

"So proud, Mr. Potter, I'm just so proud."

"Always wanted to shake your hand - I'm all of a

flutter."

"Delighted, Mr. Potter, just can't tell you, Diggle's the

name, Dedalus Diggle."

"I've seen you before!" said Harry, as Dedalus Diggle's

top hat fell off in his excitement. "You bowed to me

once in a shop."

"He remembers!" cried Dedalus Diggle, looking

around at everyone. "Did you hear that? He

remembers me!"

Harry shook hands again and again - Doris

Crockford kept coming back for more.

A pale young man made his way forward, very

nervously. One of his eyes was twitching.

"Professor Quirrell!" said Hagrid. "Harry, Professor

Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts."

"P-P-Potter," stammered Professor Quirrell, grasping

Harry's hand, "c-can't t-tell you how p-pleased I am to

meet you."

"What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?"

"D-Defense Against the D-D-Dark Arts," muttered

Professor Quirrell, as though he'd rather not think

about it. "N-not that you n-need it, eh, P-P-Potter?"

He laughed nervously. "You'll be g-getting all your

equipment, I suppose? I've g-got to p-pick up a new b-

book on vampires, m-myself." He looked terrified at

the very thought.

But the others wouldn't let Professor Quirrell keep

Harry to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get

away from them all. At last, Hagrid managed to make

himself heard over the babble.

"Must get on - lots ter buy. Come on, Harry."

Doris Crockford shook Harry's hand one last time,

and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a

small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but

a trash can and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned at Harry.

"Told yeh, didn't I? Told yeh you was famous. Even

Professor Quirrell was tremblin' ter meet yeh - mind

you, he's usually tremblin'."

"Is he always that nervous?"

"Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine

while he was studyin' outta books but then he took a

year off ter get some firsthand experience. ... They say

he met vampires in the Black Forest, and there was a

nasty bit o' trouble with a hag - never been the same

since. Scared of the students, scared of his own

subject - now, where's me umbrella?"

Vampires? Hags? Harry's head was swimming.

Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting bricks in the wall

above the trash can.

"Three up ... two across ..." he muttered. "Right,

stand back, Harry."

He tapped the wall three times with the point of his

umbrella.

The brick he had touched quivered - it wriggled - in

the middle, a small hole appeared - it grew wider

and wider - a second later they were facing an

archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway

onto a cobbled street that twisted and turned out of

sight.

"Welcome," said Hagrid, "to Diagon Alley."

He grinned at Harry's amazement. They stepped

through the archway. Harry looked quickly over his

shoulder and saw the archway shrink instantly back

into solid wall.

The sun shone brightly on a stack of cauldrons

outside the nearest shop. Cauldrons - All Sizes -

Copper, Brass, Pewter, Silver - Self-Stirring -

Collapsible, said a sign hanging over them.

"Yeah, you'll be needin' one," said Hagrid, "but we

gotta get yer money first."

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He

turned his head in every direction as they walked up

the street, trying to look at everything at once: the

shops, the things outside them, the people doing their

shopping. A plump woman outside an Apothecary

was shaking her head as they passed, saying,

"Dragon liver, sixteen Sickles an ounce, they're mad."

A low, soft hooting came from a dark shop with a sign

saying Eeylops Owl Emporium - Tawny, Screech,

Barn, Brown, and Snowy. Several boys of about

Harry's age had their noses pressed against a window

with broomsticks in it. "Look," Harry heard one of

them say, "the new Nimbus Two Thousand - fastest

ever - " There were shops selling robes, shops selling

telescopes and strange silver instruments Harry had

never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of

bat spleens and eels' eyes, tottering piles of spell

books, quills, and rolls of parchment, potion bottles,

globes of the moon. ...

"Gringotts," said Hagrid.

They had reached a snowy white building that

towered over the other little shops. Standing beside

its burnished bronze doors, wearing a uniform of

scarlet and gold, was -

"Yeah, that's a goblin," said Hagrid quietly as they

walked up the white stone steps toward him. The

goblin was about a head shorter than Harry. He had a

swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Harry

noticed, very long fingers and feet. He bowed as they

walked inside. Now they were facing a second pair of

doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon

them:

Enter, stranger, but take heed

Of what awaits the sin of greed,

For those who take, but do not earn,

Must pay most dearly in their turn.

So if you seek beneath our floors

A treasure that was never yours,

Thief, you have been warned, beware

Of finding more than treasure there.

"Like I said, yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it," said

Hagrid.

A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver doors

and they were in a vast marble hall. About a hundred

more goblins were sitting on high stools behind a long

counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins in

brass scales, examining precious stones through

eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count

leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were

showing people in and out of these. Hagrid and Harry

made for the counter.

"Morning," said Hagrid to a free goblin. "We've come

ter take some money outta Mr. Harry Potter's safe."

"You have his key, sir?"

"Got it here somewhere," said Hagrid, and he started

emptying his pockets onto the counter, scattering a

handful of moldy dog biscuits over the goblins book of

numbers. The goblin wrinkled his nose. Harry

watched the goblin on their right weighing a pile of

rubies as big as glowing coals.

"Got it," said Hagrid at last, holding up a tiny golden

key.

The goblin looked at it closely.

"That seems to be in order."

"An' I've also got a letter here from Professor

Dumbledore," said Hagrid importantly, throwing out

his chest. "It's about the You-Know-What in vault

seven hundred and thirteen."

The goblin read the letter carefully.

"Very well," he said, handing it back to Hagrid, "I will

have someone take you down to both vaults.

Griphook!"

Griphook was yet another goblin. Once Hagrid had

crammed all the dog biscuits back inside his pockets,

he and Harry followed Griphook toward one of the

doors leading off the hall.

"What's the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred

and thirteen?" Harry asked.

"Can't tell yeh that," said Hagrid mysteriously. "Very

secret. Hogwarts business. Dumbledore's trusted me.

More'n my job's worth ter tell yeh that."

Griphook held the door open for them. Harry, who

had expected more marble, was surprised. They were

in a narrow stone passageway lit with flaming

torches. It sloped steeply downward and there were

little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled

and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks toward

them. They climbed in - Hagrid with some difficulty

- and were off.

At first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting

passages. Harry tried to remember, left, right, right,

left, middle fork, right, left, but it was impossible. The

rattling cart seemed to know its own way, because

Griphook wasn't steering.

Harry's eyes stung as the cold air rushed past them,

but he kept them wide open. Once, he thought he saw

a burst of fire at the end of a passage and twisted

around to see if it was a dragon, but too late - they

plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake

where huge stalactites and stalagmites grew from the

ceiling and floor.

"I never know," Harry called to Hagrid over the noise

of the cart, "what's the difference between a

stalagmite and a stalactite?"

"Stalagmite's got an ‘m' in it," said Hagrid. "An' don'

ask me questions just now, I think I'm gonna be

sick."

He did look very green, and when the cart stopped at

last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid

got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his

knees from trembling.

Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke

came billowing out, and as it cleared, Harry gasped.

Inside were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver.

Heaps of little bronze Knuts.

"All yours," smiled Hagrid.

All Harry's - it was incredible. The Dursleys couldn't

have known about this or they'd have had it from him

faster than blinking. How often had they complained

how much Harry cost them to keep? And all the time

there had been a small fortune belonging to him,

buried deep under London.

Hagrid helped Harry pile some of it into a bag.

"The gold ones are Galleons," he explained.

"Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine

Knuts to a Sickle, it's easy enough. Right, that should

be enough fer a couple o' terms, we'll keep the rest

safe for yeh." He turned to Griphook. "Vault seven

hundred and thirteen now, please, and can we go

more slowly?"

"One speed only," said Griphook.

They were going even deeper now and gathering

speed. The air became colder and colder as they

hurtled round tight corners. They went rattling over

an underground ravine, and Harry leaned over the

side to try to see what was down at the dark bottom,

but Hagrid groaned and pulled him back by the scruff

of his neck.

Vault seven hundred and thirteen had no keyhole.

"Stand back," said Griphook importantly. He stroked

the door gently with one of his long fingers and it

simply melted away.

"If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they'd be

sucked through the door and trapped in there," said

Griphook.

"How often do you check to see if anyone's inside?"

Harry asked.

"About once every ten years," said Griphook with a

rather nasty grin.

Something really extraordinary had to be inside this

top security vault, Harry was sure, and he leaned

forward eagerly, expecting to see fabulous jewels at

the very least - but at first he thought it was empty.

Then he noticed a grubby little package wrapped up

in brown paper lying on the floor. Hagrid picked it up

and tucked it deep inside his coat. Harry longed to

know what it was, but knew better than to ask.

"Come on, back in this infernal cart, and don't talk to

me on the way back, it's best if I keep me mouth

shut," said Hagrid.

One wild cart ride later they stood blinking in the

sunlight outside Gringotts. Harry didn't know where

to run first now that he had a bag full of money. He

didn't have to know how many Galleons there were to

a pound to know that he was holding more money

than he'd had in his whole life - more money than

even Dudley had ever had.

"Might as well get yer uniform," said Hagrid, nodding

toward Madam Malkin's Robes for All Occasions.

"Listen, Harry, would yeh mind if I slipped off fer a

pick-me-up in the Leaky Cauldron? I hate them

Gringotts carts." He did still look a bit sick, so Harry

entered Madam Malkin's shop alone, feeling nervous.

Madam Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed all

in mauve.

"Hogwarts, dear?" she said, when Harry started to

speak. "Got the lot here - another young man being

fitted up just now, in fact."

In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed

face was standing on a footstool while a second witch

pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood

Harry on a stool next to him, slipped a long robe over

his head, and began to pin it to the right length.

"Hello," said the boy, "Hogwarts, too?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"My father's next door buying my books and mother's

up the street looking at wands," said the boy. He had

a bored, drawling voice. "Then I'm going to drag them

off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first years

can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into

getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow."

Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley.

"Have you got your own broom?" the boy went on.

"No," said Harry.

"Play Quidditch at all?"

"No," Harry said again, wondering what on earth

Quidditch could be.

" I do - Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to

play for my House, and I must say, I agree. Know

what House you 11 be in yet?"

"No," said Harry, feeling more stupid by the minute.

"Well, no one really knows until they get there, do

they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our family

have been - imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd

leave, wouldn't you?"

"Mmm," said Harry, wishing he could say something a

bit more interesting.

"I say, look at that man!" said the boy suddenly,

nodding toward the front window. Hagrid was

standing there, grinning at Harry and pointing at two

large ice creams to show he couldn't come in.

"That's Hagrid," said Harry, pleased to know

something the boy didn't. "He works at Hogwarts."

"Oh," said the boy, "I've heard of him. He's a sort of

servant, isn't he?"

"He's the gamekeeper," said Harry. He was liking the

boy less and less every second.

"Yes, exactly. I heard he's a sort of savage - lives in a

hut on the school grounds and every now and then he

gets drunk, tries to do magic, and ends up setting fire

to his bed."

"I think he's brilliant," said Harry coldly.

"Do you?" said the boy, with a slight sneer. "Why is he

with you? Where are your parents?"

"They're dead," said Harry shortly. He didn't feel

much like going into the matter with this boy.

"Oh, sorry," said the other, not sounding sorry at all.

"But they were our kind, weren't they?"

"They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you

mean."

"I really don't think they should let the other sort in,

do you? They're just not the same, they've never been

brought up to know our ways. Some of them have

never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter,

imagine. I think they should keep it in the old

wizarding families. What's your surname, anyway?"

But before Harry could answer, Madam Malkin said,

"That's you done, my dear," and Harry, not sorry for

an excuse to stop talking to the boy, hopped down

from the footstool.

"Well, I'll see you at Hogwarts, I suppose," said the

drawling boy.

Harry was rather quiet as he ate the ice cream Hagrid

had bought him (chocolate and raspberry with

chopped nuts).

"What's up?" said Hagrid.

"Nothing," Harry lied. They stopped to buy parchment

and quills. Harry cheered up a bit when he found a

bottle of ink that changed color as you wrote. When

they had left the shop, he said, "Hagrid, what's

Quidditch?"

"Blimey, Harry, I keep forgettin' how little yeh know -

not knowin' about Quidditch!"

"Don't make me feel worse," said Harry. He told

Hagrid about the pale boy in Madam Malkin's.

" - and he said people from Muggle families shouldn't

even be allowed in - "

"Yer not from a Muggle family. If he'd known who yeh

were - he's grown up knowin' yer name if his

parents are wizardin' folk. You saw what everyone in

the Leaky Cauldron was like when they saw yeh.

Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best

I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a

long line o' Muggles - look at yer mum! Look what

she had fer a sister!"

"So what is Quidditch?"

"It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like - like soccer in

the Muggle world - everyone follows Quidditch -

played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four

balls - sorta hard ter explain the rules."

"And what are Slytherin and Hufflepuff?"

"School Houses. There's four. Everyone says

Hufflepuff are a lot o' duffers, but - "

"I bet I'm in Hufflepuff," said Harry gloomily.

"Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin," said Hagrid darkly.

"There's not a single witch or wizard who went bad

who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one."

"Vol-, sorry - You-Know-Who was at Hogwarts?"

"Years an' years ago," said Hagrid.

They bought Harry's school books in a shop called

Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to

the ceiling with books as large as paving stones

bound in leather; books the size of postage stamps in

covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a

few books with nothing in them at all. Even Dudley,

who never read anything, would have been wild to get

his hands on some of these. Hagrid almost had to

drag Harry away from Curses and Counter-curses

(Bewitch Your Friends and Befuddle Your Enemies

with the Latest Revenges: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs,

Tongue-Tying and Much, Much More) by Professor

Vindictus Viridian.

"I was trying to find out how to curse Dudley."

"I'm not sayin' that's not a good idea, but yer not ter

use magic in the Muggle world except in very special

circumstances," said Hagrid. "An' anyway, yeh

couldn' work any of them curses yet, yeh'll need a lot

more study before yeh get ter that level."

Hagrid wouldn't let Harry buy a solid gold cauldron,

either ("It says pewter on yer list"), but they got a nice

set of scales for weighing potion ingredients and a

collapsible brass telescope. Then they visited the

Apothecary, which was fascinating enough to make

up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and

rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the

floor; jars of herbs, dried roots, and bright powders

lined the walls; bundles of feathers, strings of fangs,

and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While

Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a

supply of some basic potion ingredients for Harry,

Harry himself examined silver unicorn horns at

twenty-one Galleons each and minuscule, glittery-

black beetle eyes (five Knuts a scoop).

Outside the Apothecary, Hagrid checked Harry's list

again.

"Just yer wand left - oh yeah, an' I still haven't got

yeh a birthday present."

Harry felt himself go red.

"You don't have to - "

"I know I don't have to. Tell yeh what, I'll get yer

animal. Not a toad, toads went outta fashion years

ago, yeh'd be laughed at - an' I don' like cats, they

make me sneeze. I'll get yer an owl. All the kids want

owls, they're dead useful, carry yer mail an'

everythin'."

Twenty minutes later, they left Eeylops Owl

Emporium, which had been dark and full of rustling

and flickering, jewel-bright eyes. Harry now carried a

large cage that held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep

with her head under her wing. He couldn't stop

stammering his thanks, sounding just like Professor

Quirrell.

"Don' mention it," said Hagrid gruffly. "Don' expect

you've had a lotta presents from them Dursleys. Just

Ollivanders left now - only place fer wands,

Ollivanders, and yeh gotta have the best wand."

A magic wand . . . this was what Harry had been really

looking forward to.

The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold

letters over the door read Ollivanders: Makers of Fine

Wands since 382b. c. A single wand lay on a faded

purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the

shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place,

empty except for a single, spindly chair that Hagrid

sat on to wait. Harry felt strangely as though he had

entered a very strict library; he swallowed a lot of new

questions that had just occurred to him and looked

instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly

right up to the ceiling. For some reason, the back of

his neck prickled. The very dust and silence in here

seemed to tingle with some secret magic.

"Good afternoon," said a soft voice. Harry jumped.

Hagrid must have jumped, too, because there was a

loud crunching noise and he got quickly off the

spindly chair.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale

eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the

shop.

"Hello," said Harry awkwardly.

"Ah yes," said the man. "Yes, yes. I thought I'd be

seeing you soon. Harry Potter." It wasn't a question.

"You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday

she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten

and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow.

Nice wand for charm work."

Mr. Ollivander moved closer to Harry. Harry wished

he would blink. Those silvery eyes were a bit creepy.

"Your father, on the other hand, favored a mahogany

wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and

excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father

favored it - it's really the wand that chooses the

wizard, of course."

Mr. Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry

were almost nose to nose. Harry could see himself

reflected in those misty eyes.

"And that's where ..."

Mr. Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Harry's

forehead with a long, white finger.

"I'm sorry to say I sold the wand that did it," he said

softly. "Thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Powerful

wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands ... well,

if I'd known what that wand was going out into the

world to do. ..."

He shook his head and then, to Harry's relief, spotted

Hagrid.

"Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! How nice to see you again.

... Oak, sixteen inches, rather bendy, wasn't it?"

"It was, sir, yes," said Hagrid.

"Good wand, that one. But I suppose they snapped it

in half when you got expelled?" said Mr. Ollivander,

suddenly stern.

"Er - yes, they did, yes," said Hagrid, shuffling his

feet. "I've still got the pieces, though," he added

brightly.

"But you don't use them?" said Mr. Ollivander

sharply.

"Oh, no, sir," said Hagrid quickly. Harry noticed he

gripped his pink umbrella very tightly as he spoke.

"Hmmm," said Mr. Ollivander, giving Hagrid a

piercing look. "Well, now - Mr. Potter. Let me see."

He pulled a long tape measure with silver markings

out of his pocket. "Which is your wand arm?"

"Er - well, I'm right-handed," said Harry.

"Hold out your arm. That's it." He measured Harry

from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder

to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he

measured, he said, "Every Ollivander wand has a core

of a powerful magical substance, Mr. Potter. We use

unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers, and the

heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are

the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons, or

phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will

never get such good results with another wizard's

wand."

Harry suddenly realized that the tape measure, which

was measuring between his nostrils, was doing this

on its own. Mr. Ollivander was flitting around the

shelves, taking down boxes.

"That will do," he said, and the tape measure

crumpled into a heap on the floor. "Right then, Mr.

Potter. Try this one. Beech-wood and dragon

heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take

it and give it a wave."

Harry took the wand and (feeling foolish) waved it

around a bit, but Mr. Ollivander snatched it out of his

hand almost at once.

"Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite

whippy. Try - "

Harry tried - but he had hardly raised the wand

when it, too, was snatched back by Mr. Ollivander.

"No, no - here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a

half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out."

Harry tried. And tried. He had no idea what Mr.

Ollivander was waiting for. The pile of tried wands

was mounting higher and higher on the spindly chair,

but the more wands Mr. Ollivander pulled from the

shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

"Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, well find the

perfect match here somewhere - I wonder, now -

yes, why not - unusual combination - holly and

phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple."

Harry took the wand. He felt a sudden warmth in his

fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it

swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of

red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework,

throwing dancing spots of light on to the walls. Hagrid

whooped and clapped and Mr. Ollivander cried, "Oh,

bravo! Yes, indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well ...

how curious ... how very curious ..."

He put Harry's wand back into its box and wrapped it

in brown paper, still muttering, "Curious . . . curious

"Sorry," said Harry, "but what's curious?"

Mr. Ollivander fixed Harry with his pale stare.

"I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr. Potter.

Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix

whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another

feather - just one other. It is very curious indeed

that you should be destined for this wand when its

brother - why, its brother gave you that scar."

Harry swallowed.

"Yes, thirteen-and-a-half inches. Yew. Curious indeed

how these things happen. The wand chooses the

wizard, remember. ... I think we must expect great

things from you, Mr. Potter. ... After all, He-Who-

Must-Not-Be-Named did great things - terrible, yes,

but great."

Harry shivered. He wasn't sure he liked Mr.

Ollivander too much. He paid seven gold Galleons for

his wand, and Mr. Ollivander bowed them from his

shop.

The late afternoon sun hung low in the sky as Harry

and Hagrid made their way back down Diagon Alley,

back through the wall, back through the Leaky

Cauldron, now empty. Harry didn't speak at all as

they walked down the road; he didn't even notice how

much people were gawking at them on the

Underground, laden as they were with all their funny-

shaped packages, with the snowy owl asleep in its

cage on Harry's lap. Up another escalator, out into

Paddington station; Harry only realized where they

were when Hagrid tapped him on the shoulder.

"Got time fer a bite to eat before yer train leaves," he

said.

He bought Harry a hamburger and they sat down on

plastic seats to eat them. Harry kept looking around.

Everything looked so strange, somehow.

"You all right, Harry? Yer very quiet," said Hagrid.

Harry wasn't sure he could explain. He'd just had the

best birthday of his life - and yet - he chewed his

hamburger, trying to find the words.

"Everyone thinks I'm special," he said at last. "All

those people in the Leaky Cauldron, Professor

Quirrell, Mr. Ollivander ... but I don't know anything

about magic at all. How can they expect great things?

I'm famous and I can't even remember what I'm

famous for. I don't know what happened when Vol-,

sorry - I mean, the night my parents died."

Hagrid leaned across the table. Behind the wild beard

and eyebrows he wore a very kind smile.

"Don' you worry, Harry. You'll learn fast enough.

Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you'll

be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it's hard. Yeh've

been singled out, an' that's always hard. But yeh'll

have a great time at Hogwarts - I did - still do,

'smatter of fact."

Hagrid helped Harry on to the train that would take

him back to the Dursleys, then handed him an

envelope.

"Yer ticket fer Hogwarts," he said. "First o' September

- King's Cross - it's all on yer ticket. Any problems

with the Dursleys, send me a letter with yer owl, she'll

know where to find me. ... See yeh soon, Harry."

The train pulled out of the station. Harry wanted to

watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; he rose in his

seat and pressed his nose against the window, but he

blinked and Hagrid had gone.

THE JOURNEY FROM PLATFORM

NINE AND THREE-QUARTERS

Harry's last month with the Dursleys wasn't fun.

True, Dudley was now so scared of Harry he wouldn't

stay in the same room, while Aunt Petunia and Uncle

Vernon didn't shut Harry in his cupboard, force him

to do anything, or shout at him - in fact, they didn't

speak to him at all. Half terrified, half furious, they

acted as though any chair with Harry in it were

empty. Although this was an improvement in many

ways, it did become a bit depressing after a while.

Harry kept to his room, with his new owl for

company. He had decided to call her Hedwig, a name

he had found in A History of Magic. His school books

were very interesting. He lay on his bed reading late

into the night, Hedwig swooping in and out of the

open window as she pleased. It was lucky that Aunt

Petunia didn't come in to vacuum anymore, because

Hedwig kept bringing back dead mice. Every night

before he went to sleep, Harry ticked off another day

on the piece of paper he had pinned to the wall,

counting down to September the first.

On the last day of August he thought he'd better

speak to his aunt and uncle about getting to King's

Cross station the next day, so he went down to the

living room where they were watching a quiz show on

television. He cleared his throat to let them know he

was there, and Dudley screamed and ran from the

room.

"Er - Uncle Vernon?"

Uncle Vernon grunted to show he was listening.

"Er - I need to be at King's Cross tomorrow to - to

go to Hogwarts."

Uncle Vernon grunted again.

"Would it be all right if you gave me a lift?"

Grunt. Harry supposed that meant yes.

"Thank you."

He was about to go back upstairs when Uncle Vernon

actually spoke.

"Funny way to get to a wizards' school, the train.

Magic carpets all got punctures, have they?"

Harry didn't say anything.

"Where is this school, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Harry, realizing this for the first

time. He pulled the ticket Hagrid had given him out of

his pocket.

"I just take the train from platform nine and three-

quarters at eleven o'clock," he read.

His aunt and uncle stared.

"Platform what?"

"Nine and three-quarters."

"Don't talk rubbish," said Uncle Vernon. "There is no

platform nine and three-quarters."

"It's on my ticket."

"Barking," said Uncle Vernon, "howling mad, the lot of

them. You 11 see. You just wait. All right, we'll take

you to King's Cross. We're going up to London

tomorrow anyway, or I wouldn't bother."

"Why are you going to London?" Harry asked, trying

to keep things friendly.

"Taking Dudley to the hospital," growled Uncle

Vernon. "Got to have that ruddy tail removed before

he goes to Smeltings."

Harry woke at five o'clock the next morning and was

too excited and nervous to go back to sleep. He got up

and pulled on his jeans because he didn't want to

walk into the station in his wizard's robes - he'd

change on the train. He checked his Hogwarts list yet

again to make sure he had everything he needed, saw

that Hedwig was shut safely in her cage, and then

paced the room, waiting for the Dursleys to get up.

Two hours later, Harry's huge, heavy trunk had been

loaded into the Dursleys' car, Aunt Petunia had

talked Dudley into sitting next to Harry, and they had

set off.

They reached King's Cross at half past ten. Uncle

Vernon dumped Harry's trunk onto a cart and

wheeled it into the station for him. Harry thought this

was strangely kind until Uncle Vernon stopped dead,

facing the platforms with a nasty grin on his face.

"Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine - platform

ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the

middle, but they don't seem to have built it yet, do

they?"

He was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic

number nine over one platform and a big plastic

number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle,

nothing at all.

"Have a good term," said Uncle Vernon with an even

nastier smile. He left without another word. Harry

turned and saw the Dursleys drive away. All three of

them were laughing. Harry's mouth went rather dry.

What on earth was he going to do? He was starting to

attract a lot of funny looks, because of Hedwig. He'd

have to ask someone.

He stopped a passing guard, but didn't dare mention

platform nine and three-quarters. The guard had

never heard of Hogwarts and when Harry couldn't

even tell him what part of the country it was in, he

started to get annoyed, as though Harry was being

stupid on purpose. Getting desperate, Harry asked for

the train that left at eleven o'clock, but the guard said

there wasn't one. In the end the guard strode away,

muttering about time wasters. Harry was now trying

hard not to panic. According to the large clock over

the arrivals board, he had ten minutes left to get on

the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it;

he was stranded in the middle of a station with a

trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard

money, and a large owl.

Hagrid must have forgotten to tell him something you

had to do, like tapping the third brick on the left to

get into Diagon Alley. He wondered if he should get

out his wand and start tapping the ticket inspector's

stand between platforms nine and ten.

At that moment a group of people passed just behind

him and he caught a few words of what they were

saying.

" - packed with Muggles, of course - "

Harry swung round. The speaker was a plump

woman who was talking to four boys, all with flaming

red hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like

Harry's in front of him - and they had an owl.

Heart hammering, Harry pushed his cart after them.

They stopped and so did he, just near enough to hear

what they were saying.

"Now, what's the platform number?" said the boys'

mother.

"Nine and three-quarters!" piped a small girl, also red-

headed, who was holding her hand, "Mom, can't I go

"You're not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet. All right,

Percy, you go first."

What looked like the oldest boy marched toward

platforms nine and ten. Harry watched, careful not to

blink in case he missed it - but just as the boy

reached the dividing barrier between the two

platforms, a large crowd of tourists came swarming in

front of him and by the time the last backpack had

cleared away, the boy had vanished.

"Fred, you next," the plump woman said.

"I'm not Fred, I'm George," said the boy. "Honestly,

woman, you call yourself our mother? Can't you tell

I'm George?"

"Sorry, George, dear."

"Only joking, I am Fred," said the boy, and off he

went. His twin called after him to hurry up, and he

must have done so, because a second later, he had

gone - but how had he done it?

Now the third brother was walking briskly toward the

barrier - he was almost there - and then, quite

suddenly, he wasn't anywhere.

There was nothing else for it.

"Excuse me," Harry said to the plump woman.

"Hello, dear," she said. "First time at Hogwarts? Ron's

new, too."

She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He

was tall, thin, and gangling, with freckles, big hands

and feet, and a long nose.

"Yes," said Harry. "The thing is - the thing is, I don't

know how to - "

"How to get onto the platform?" she said kindly, and

Harry nodded.

"Not to worry," she said. "All you have to do is walk

straight at the barrier between platforms nine and

ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into

it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if

you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron."

"Er - okay," said Harry.

He pushed his trolley around and stared at the

barrier. It looked very solid.

He started to walk toward it. People jostled him on

their way to platforms nine and ten. Harry walked

more quickly. He was going to smash right into that

barrier and then he'd be in trouble - leaning forward

on his cart, he broke into a heavy run - the barrier

was coming nearer and nearer - he wouldn't be able

to stop - the cart was out of control - he was a foot

away - he closed his eyes ready for the crash -

It didn't come ... he kept on running ... he opened his

eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform

packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts

Express, eleven o'clock. Harry looked behind him and

saw a wrought-iron archway where the barrier had

been, with the words Platform Nine and Three-

Quarters on it. He had done it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the

chattering crowd, while cats of every color wound

here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to one

another in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble

and the scraping of heavy trunks.

The first few carriages were already packed with

students, some hanging out of the window to talk to

their families, some fighting over seats. Harry pushed

his cart off down the platform in search of an empty

seat. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying,

"Gran, I've lost my toad again."

"Oh, Neville," he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small

crowd.

"Give us a look, Lee, go on."

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms, and the

people around him shrieked and yelled as something

inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry pressed on through the crowd until he found

an empty compartment near the end of the train. He

put Hedwig inside first and then started to shove and

heave his trunk toward the train door. He tried to lift

it up the steps but could hardly raise one end and

twice he dropped it painfully on his foot.

"Want a hand?" It was one of the red-haired twins

he'd followed through the barrier.

"Yes, please," Harry panted.

"Oy, Fred! C'mere and help!"

With the twins' help, Harry's trunk was at last tucked

away in a corner of the compartment.

"Thanks," said Harry, pushing his sweaty hair out of

his eyes.

"What's that?" said one of the twins suddenly,

pointing at Harry's lightning scar.

"Blimey," said the other twin. "Are you - ?"

"He is," said the first twin. "Aren't you?" he added to

Harry.

"What?" said Harry.

" Harry Potter," chorused the twins.

"Oh, him," said Harry. "I mean, yes, I am."

The two boys gawked at him, and Harry felt himself

turning red. Then, to his relief, a voice came floating

in through the train's open door.

"Fred? George? Are you there?"

"Coming, Mom."

With a last look at Harry, the twins hopped off the

train.

Harry sat down next to the window where, half

hidden, he could watch the red-haired family on the

platform and hear what they were saying. Their

mother had just taken out her handkerchief.

"Ron, you've got something on your nose."

The youngest boy tried to jerk out of the way, but she

grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose.

"Mom - geroff." He wriggled free.

"Aaah, has ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nosie?"

said one of the twins.

"Shut up," said Ron.

"Where's Percy?" said their mother.

"He's coming now."

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He had

already changed into his billowing black Hogwarts

robes, and Harry noticed a shiny red and gold badge

on his chest with the letter P on it.

"Can't stay long, Mother," he said. "I'm up front, the

prefects have got two compartments to themselves - "

"Oh, are you a prefect, Percy?" said one of the twins,

with an air of great surprise. "You should have said

something, we had no idea."

"Hang on, I think I remember him saying something

about it," said the other twin. "Once - "

"Or twice - "

"A minute - "

"All summer - "

"Oh, shut up," said Percy the Prefect.

"How come Percy gets new robes, anyway?" said one

of the twins.

"Because he's a prefect," said their mother fondly. "All

right, dear, well, have a good term - send me an owl

when you get there."

She kissed Percy on the cheek and he left. Then she

turned to the twins.

"Now, you two - this year, you behave yourselves. If I

get one more owl telling me you've - you've blown up

a toilet or - "

"Blown up a toilet? We've never blown up a toilet."

"Great idea though, thanks, Mom."

"It's not funny. And look after Ron."

"Don't worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us."

"Shut up," said Ron again. He was almost as tall as

the twins already and his nose was still pink where

his mother had rubbed it.

"Hey, Mom, guess what? Guess who we just met on

the train?"

Harry leaned back quickly so they couldn't see him

looking.

"You know that black-haired boy who was near us in

the station? Know who he is?"

"Who?"

" Harry Potted"

Harry heard the little girl's voice.

"Oh, Mom, can I go on the train and see him, Mom,

oh please. ..."

"You've already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy

isn't something you goggle at in a zoo. Is he really,

Fred? How do you know?"

"Asked him. Saw his scar. It's really there - like

lightning."

"Poor dear - no wonder he was alone, I wondered. He

was ever so polite when he asked how to get onto the

platform."

"Never mind that, do you think he remembers what

You-Know-Who looks like?"

Their mother suddenly became very stern.

"I forbid you to ask him, Fred. No, don't you dare. As

though he needs reminding of that on his first day at

school."

"All right, keep your hair on."

A whistle sounded.

"Hurry up!" their mother said, and the three boys

clambered onto the train. They leaned out of the

window for her to kiss them good-bye, and their

younger sister began to cry.

"Don't, Ginny, we'll send you loads of owls."

"Well send you a Hogwarts toilet seat."

" Georg e\"

"Only joking, Mom."

The train began to move. Harry saw the boys' mother

waving and their sister, half laughing, half crying,

running to keep up with the train until it gathered too

much speed, then she fell back and waved.

Harry watched the girl and her mother disappear as

the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the

window. Harry felt a great leap of excitement. He

didn't know what he was going to - but it had to be

better than what he was leaving behind.

The door of the compartment slid open and the

youngest redheaded boy came in.

"Anyone sitting there?" he asked, pointing at the seat

opposite Harry. "Everywhere else is full."

Harry shook his head and the boy sat down. He

glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out of the

window, pretending he hadn't looked. Harry saw he

still had a black mark on his nose.

"Hey, Ron."

The twins were back.

"Listen, we're going down the middle of the train -

Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula down there."

"Right," mumbled Ron.

"Harry," said the other twin, "did we introduce

ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is Ron,

our brother. See you later, then."

"Bye," said Harry and Ron. The twins slid the

compartment door shut behind them.

"Are you really Harry Potter?" Ron blurted out.

Harry nodded.

"Oh - well, I thought it might be one of Fred and

George's jokes," said Ron. "And have you really got -

you know ..."

He pointed at Harry's forehead.

Harry pulled back his bangs to show the lightning

scar. Ron stared.

"So that's where You-Know-Who - ?"

"Yes," said Harry, "but I can't remember it."

"Nothing?" said Ron eagerly.

"Well - I remember a lot of green light, but nothing

else."

"Wow," said Ron. He sat and stared at Harry for a few

moments, then, as though he had suddenly realized

what he was doing, he looked quickly out of the

window again.

"Are all your family wizards?" asked Harry, who found

Ron just as interesting as Ron found him.

"Er - yes, I think so," said Ron. "I think Mom's got a

second cousin who's an accountant, but we never talk

about him."

"So you must know loads of magic already."

The Weasleys were clearly one of those old wizarding

families the pale boy in Diagon Alley had talked

about.

"I heard you went to live with Muggles," said Ron.

"What are they like?"

"Horrible - well, not all of them. My aunt and uncle

and cousin are, though. Wish I'd had three wizard

brothers."

"Five," said Ron. For some reason, he was looking

gloomy. "I'm the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts.

You could say I've got a lot to live up to. Bill and

Charlie have already left - Bill was head boy and

Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy's a

prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they

still get really good marks and everyone thinks they're

really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the

others, but if I do, it's no big deal, because they did it

first. You never get anything new, either, with five

brothers. I've got Bill's old robes, Charlie's old wand,

and Percy's old rat."

Ron reached inside his jacket and pulled out a fat

gray rat, which was asleep.

"His name's Scabbers and he's useless, he hardly ever

wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being

made a prefect, but they couldn't aff - I mean, I got

Scabbers instead."

Ron's ears went pink. He seemed to think he'd said

too much, because he went back to staring out of the

window.

Harry didn't think there was anything wrong with not

being able to afford an owl. After all, he'd never had

any money in his life until a month ago, and he told

Ron so, all about having to wear Dudley's old clothes

and never getting proper birthday presents. This

seemed to cheer Ron up.

"... and until Hagrid told me, I didn't know anything

about being a wizard or about my parents or

Voldemort - "

Ron gasped.

"What?" said Harry.

" You said You-Know-Who's name\" said Ron, sounding

both shocked and impressed. "I'd have thought you,

of all people - "

"I'm not trying to be brave or anything, saying the

name," said Harry, "I just never knew you shouldn't.

See what I mean? I've got loads to learn. ... I bet," he

added, voicing for the first time something that had

been worrying him a lot lately, "I bet I'm the worst in

the class."

"You won't be. There's loads of people who come from

Muggle families and they learn quick enough."

While they had been talking, the train had carried

them out of London. Now they were speeding past

fields full of cows and sheep. They were quiet for a

time, watching the fields and lanes flick past.

Around half past twelve there was a great clattering

outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman

slid back their door and said, "Anything off the cart,

dears?"

Harry, who hadn't had any breakfast, leapt to his feet,

but Ron's ears went pink again and he muttered that

he'd brought sandwiches. Harry went out into the

corridor.

He had never had any money for candy with the

Dursleys, and now that he had pockets rattling with

gold and silver he was ready to buy as many Mars

Bars as he could carry - but the woman didn't have

Mars Bars. What she did have were Bertie Bott's

Every Flavor Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum,

Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes,

Licorice Wands, and a number of other strange things

Harry had never seen in his life. Not wanting to miss

anything, he got some of everything and paid the

woman eleven silver Sickles and seven bronze Knuts.

Ron stared as Harry brought it all back in to the

compartment and tipped it onto an empty seat.

"Hungry, are you?"

"Starving," said Harry, taking a large bite out of a

pumpkin pasty.

Ron had taken out a lumpy package and unwrapped

it. There were four sandwiches inside. He pulled one

of them apart and said, "She always forgets I don't

like corned beef."

"Swap you for one of these," said Harry, holding up a

pasty. "Go on - "

"You don't want this, it's all dry," said Ron. "She

hasn't got much time," he added quickly, "you know,

with five of us."

"Go on, have a pasty," said Harry, who had never had

anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share

it with. It was a nice feeling, sitting there with Ron,

eating their way through all Harry's pasties, cakes,

and candies (the sandwiches lay forgotten).

"What are these?" Harry asked Ron, holding up a

pack of Chocolate Frogs. "They're not really frogs, are

they?" He was starting to feel that nothing would

surprise him.

"No," said Ron. "But see what the card is. I'm missing

Agrippa."

"What?"

"Oh, of course, you wouldn't know - Chocolate Frogs

have cards inside them, you know, to collect -

famous witches and wizards. I've got about five

hundred, but I haven't got Agrippa or Ptolemy."

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up

the card. It showed a man's face. He wore half-moon

glasses, had a long, crooked nose, and flowing silver

hair, beard, and mustache. Underneath the picture

was the name Albus Dumbledore.

"So this is Dumbledore!" said Harry.

"Don't tell me you'd never heard of Dumbledore!" said

Ron. "Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa - thanks

Harry turned over his card and read:

ALBUS DUMBLEDORE

CURRENTLY HEADMASTER OF HOGWARTS

Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern

times, Dumbledore is particularly famous for his

defeat of the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the

discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his

work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel.

Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and ten

pin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw, to his

astonishment, that Dumbledore 's face had

disappeared.

"He's gone!"

"Well, you can't expect him to hang around all day,"

said Ron. "He'll be back. No, I've got Morgana again

and I've got about six of her ... do you want it? You

can start collecting."

Ron's eyes strayed to the pile of Chocolate Frogs

waiting to be unwrapped.

"Help yourself," said Harry. "But in, you know, the

Muggle world, people just stay put in photos."

"Do they? What, they don't move at all?" Ron sounded

amazed. "Weird)."

Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the

picture on his card and gave him a small smile. Ron

was more interested in eating the frogs than looking

at the Famous Witches and Wizards cards, but Harry

couldn't keep his eyes off them. Soon he had not only

Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of Woodcraft,

Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus, and Merlin. He

finally tore his eyes away from the druidess Cliodna,

who was scratching her nose, to open a bag of Bertie

Bott's Every Flavor Beans.

"You want to be careful with those," Ron warned

Harry. "When they say every flavor, they mean every

flavor - you know, you get all the ordinary ones like

chocolate and peppermint and marmalade, but then

you can get spinach and liver and tripe. George

reckons he had a booger-flavored one once."

Ron picked up a green bean, looked at it carefully,

and bit into a corner.

"Bleaaargh - see? Sprouts."

They had a good time eating the Every Flavor Beans.

Harry got toast, coconut, baked bean, strawberry,

curry, grass, coffee, sardine, and was even brave

enough to nibble the end off a funny gray one Ron

wouldn't touch, which turned out to be pepper.

The countryside now flying past the window was

becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there

were woods, twisting rivers, and dark green hills.

There was a knock on the door of their compartment

and the round-faced boy Harry had passed on

platform nine and three-quarters came in. He looked

tearful.

"Sorry," he said, "but have you seen a toad at all?"

When they shook their heads, he wailed, "I've lost

him! He keeps getting away from me!"

"Hell turn up," said Harry.

"Yes," said the boy miserably. "Well, if you see him ..."

He left.

"Don't know why he's so bothered," said Ron. "If I'd

brought a toad I'd lose it as quick as I could. Mind

you, I brought Scabbers, so I can't talk."

The rat was still snoozing on Ron's lap.

"He might have died and you wouldn't know the

difference," said Ron in disgust. "I tried to turn him

yellow yesterday to make him more interesting, but

the spell didn't work. I'll show you, look ..."

He rummaged around in his trunk and pulled out a

very battered-looking wand. It was chipped in places

and something white was glinting at the end.

"Unicorn hair's nearly poking out. Anyway - "

He had just raised his wand when the compartment

door slid open again. The toadless boy was back, but

this time he had a girl with him. She was already

wearing her new Hogwarts robes.

"Has anyone seen a toad? Neville's lost one," she said.

She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown

hair, and rather large front teeth.

"We've already told him we haven't seen it," said Ron,

but the girl wasn't listening, she was looking at the

wand in his hand.

"Oh, are you doing magic? Let's see it, then."

She sat down. Ron looked taken aback.

"Er - all right."

He cleared his throat.

" Sunshine , daisies, butter mellow,

Turn this stupid, fat rat yellow."

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers

stayed gray and fast asleep.

"Are you sure that's a real spell?" said the girl. "Well,

it's not very good, is it? I've tried a few simple spells

just for practice and it's all worked for me. Nobody in

my family's magic at all, it was ever such a surprise

when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of

course, I mean, it's the very best school of witchcraft

there is, I've heard - I've learned all our course books

by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough - I'm

Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?"

She said all this very fast.

Harry looked at Ron, and was relieved to see by his

stunned face that he hadn't learned all the course

books by heart either.

"I'm Ron Weasley," Ron muttered.

"Harry Potter," said Harry.

"Are you really?" said Hermione. "I know all about

you, of course - I got a few extra books for

background reading, and you're in Modern Magical

History and The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts and

Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century."

"Am I?" said Harry, feeling dazed.

"Goodness, didn't you know, I'd have found out

everything I could if it was me," said Hermione. "Do

either of you know what House you'll be in? I've been

asking around, and I hope I'm in Gryffindor, it sounds

by far the best; I hear Dumbledore himself was in it,

but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad. ...

Anyway, we'd better go and look for Neville's toad.

You two had better change, you know, I expect we'll

be there soon."

And she left, taking the toadless boy with her.

"Whatever House I'm in, I hope she's not in it," said

Ron. He threw his wand back into his trunk. "Stupid

spell - George gave it to me, bet he knew it was a

dud."

"What House are your brothers in?" asked Harry.

"Gryffindor," said Ron. Gloom seemed to be settling

on him again. "Mom and Dad were in it, too. I don't

know what they'll say if I'm not. I don't suppose

Ravenclaw would be too bad, but imagine if they put

me in Slytherin."

"That's the House Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who was

in?"

"Yeah," said Ron. He flopped back into his seat,

looking depressed.

"You know, I think the ends of Scabbers' whiskers are

a bit lighter," said Harry, trying to take Ron's mind off

Houses. "So what do your oldest brothers do now that

they've left, anyway?"

Harry was wondering what a wizard did once he'd

finished school.

"Charlie's in Romania studying dragons, and Bill's in

Africa doing something for Gringotts," said Ron. "Did

you hear about Gringotts? It's been all over the Daily

Prophet, but I don't suppose you get that with the

Muggles - someone tried to rob a high security

vault."

Harry stared.

"Really? What happened to them?"

"Nothing, that's why it's such big news. They haven't

been caught. My dad says it must've been a powerful

Dark wizard to get round Gringotts, but they don't

think they took anything, that's what's odd. 'Course,

everyone gets scared when something like this

happens in case You-Know-Who's behind it."

Harry turned this news over in his mind. He was

starting to get a prickle of fear every time You-Know-

Who was mentioned. He supposed this was all part of

entering the magical world, but it had been a lot more

comfortable saying "Voldemort" without worrying.

"What's your Quidditch team?" Ron asked.

"Er - I don't know any," Harry confessed.

"What!" Ron looked dumbfounded. "Oh, you wait, it's

the best game in the world - " And he was off,

explaining all about the four balls and the positions of

the seven players, describing famous games he'd been

to with his brothers and the broomstick he'd like to

get if he had the money. He was just taking Harry

through the finer points of the game when the

compartment door slid open yet again, but it wasn't

Neville the toadless boy, or Hermione Granger this

time.

Three boys entered, and Harry recognized the middle

one at once: It was the pale boy from Madam Malkin's

robe shop. He was looking at Harry with a lot more

interest than he'd shown back in Diagon Alley.

"Is it true?" he said. "They're saying all down the train

that Harry Potter's in this compartment. So it's you, is

it?"

"Yes," said Harry. He was looking at the other boys.

Both of them were thickset and looked extremely

mean. Standing on either side of the pale boy, they

looked like bodyguards.

"Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle," said the pale

boy carelessly, noticing where Harry was looking.

"And my names Malfoy, Draco Malfoy."

Ron gave a slight cough, which might have been

hiding a snigger. Draco Malfoy looked at him.

"Think my name's funny, do you? No need to ask who

you are. My father told me all the Weasleys have red

hair, freckles, and more children than they can

afford."

He turned back to Harry. "You'll soon find out some

wizarding families are much better than others,

Potter. You don't want to go making friends with the

wrong sort. I can help you there."

He held out his hand to shake Harry's, but Harry

didn't take it.

"I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself,

thanks," he said coolly.

Draco Malfoy didn't go red, but a pink tinge appeared

in his pale cheeks.

"I'd be careful if I were you, Potter," he said slowly.

"Unless you're a bit politer you'll go the same way as

your parents. They didn't know what was good for

them, either. You hang around with riffraff like the

Weasleys and that Hagrid, and it'll rub off on you."

Both Harry and Ron stood up.

"Say that again," Ron said, his face as red as his hair.

"Oh, you're going to fight us, are you?" Malfoy

sneered.

"Unless you get out now," said Harry, more bravely

than he felt, because Crabbe and Goyle were a lot

bigger than him or Ron.

"But we don't feel like leaving, do we, boys? We've

eaten all our food and you still seem to have some."

Goyle reached toward the Chocolate Frogs next to

Ron - Ron leapt forward, but before he'd so much as

touched Goyle, Goyle let out a horrible yell.

Scabbers the rat was hanging off his finger, sharp

little teeth sunk deep into Goyle 's knuckle - Crabbe

and Malfoy backed away as Goyle swung Scabbers

round and round, howling, and when Scabbers finally

flew off and hit the window, all three of them

disappeared at once. Perhaps they thought there were

more rats lurking among the sweets, or perhaps

they'd heard footsteps, because a second later,

Hermione Granger had come in.

"What has been going on?" she said, looking at the

sweets all over the floor and Ron picking up Scabbers

by his tail.

"I think he's been knocked out," Ron said to Harry.

He looked closer at Scabbers. "No - I don't believe it

- he's gone back to sleep."

And so he had.

"You've met Malfoy before?"

Harry explained about their meeting in Diagon Alley.

"I've heard of his family," said Ron darkly. "They were

some of the first to come back to our side after You-

Know-Who disappeared. Said they'd been bewitched.

My dad doesn't believe it. He says Malfoy's father

didn't need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side." He

turned to Hermione. "Can we help you with

something?"

"You'd better hurry up and put your robes on, I've

just been up to the front to ask the conductor, and he

says we're nearly there. You haven't been fighting,

have you? You'll be in trouble before we even get

there!"

"Scabbers has been fighting, not us," said Ron,

scowling at her. "Would you mind leaving while we

change?"

"All right - I only came in here because people

outside are behaving very childishly, racing up and

down the corridors," said Hermione in a sniffy voice.

"And you've got dirt on your nose, by the way, did you

know?"

Ron glared at her as she left. Harry peered out of the

window. It was getting dark. He could see mountains

and forests under a deep purple sky. The train did

seem to be slowing down.

He and Ron took off their jackets and pulled on their

long black robes. Ron's were a bit short for him, you

could see his sneakers underneath them.

A voice echoed through the train: "We will be reaching

Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your

luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school

separately."

Harry's stomach lurched with nerves and Ron, he

saw, looked pale under his freckles. They crammed

their pockets with the last of the sweets and joined

the crowd thronging the corridor.

The train slowed right down and finally stopped.

People pushed their way toward the door and out on

to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cold

night air. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads

of the students, and Harry heard a familiar voice:

"Firs' years! Firs' years over here! All right there,

Harry?"

Hagrid's big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

"C'mon, follow me - any more firs' years? Mind yer

step, now! Firs' years follow me!"

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down

what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so

dark on either side of them that Harry thought there

must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much.

Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once

or twice.

"Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec," Hagrid

called over his shoulder, "jus' round this bend here."

There was a loud "Oooooh!"

The narrow path had opened suddenly onto the edge

of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain

on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry

sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

"No more'n four to a boat!" Hagrid called, pointing to

a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore.

Harry and Ron were followed into their boat by Neville

and Hermione.

"Everyone in?" shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to

himself. "Right then - FORWARD!"

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once,

gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as

glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great

castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed

nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

"Heads down!" yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached

the cliff; they all bent their heads and the little boats

carried them through a curtain of ivy that hid a wide

opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a

dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right

underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of

underground harbor, where they clambered out onto

rocks and pebbles.

"Oy, you there! Is this your toad?" said Hagrid, who

was checking the boats as people climbed out of

them.

"Trevor!" cried Neville blissfully, holding out his

hands. Then they clambered up a passageway in the

rock after Hagrid's lamp, coming out at last onto

smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded

around the huge, oak front door.

"Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?"

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times

on the castle door.

7

THE SORTING HAT

The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired

witch in emerald-green robes stood there. She had a

very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this

was not someone to cross.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here."

She pulled the door wide. The entrance hall was so

big you could have fit the whole of the Dursleys'

house in it. The stone walls were lit with flaming

torches like the ones at Gringotts, the ceiling was too

high to make out, and a magnificent marble staircase

facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor McGonagall across the

flagged stone floor. Harry could hear the drone of

hundreds of voices from a doorway to the right - the

rest of the school must already be here - but

Professor McGonagall showed the first years into a

small, empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in,

standing rather closer together than they would

usually have done, peering about nervously.

"Welcome to Hogwarts," said Professor McGonagall.

"The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but

before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will

be sorted into your Houses. The Sorting is a very

important ceremony because, while you are here,

your House will be something like your family within

Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your

House, sleep in your House dormitory, and spend free

time in your House common room.

"The four Houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff,

Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each House has its own

noble history and each has produced outstanding

witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your

triumphs will earn your House points, while any rule-

breaking will lose House points. At the end of the

year, the House with the most points is awarded the

House cup, a great honor. I hope each of you will be a

credit to whichever House becomes yours.

"The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few

minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest

you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can

while you are waiting."

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville's cloak,

which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron's

smudged nose. Harry nervously tried to flatten his

hair.

"I shall return when we are ready for you," said

Professor McGonagall. "Please wait quietly."

She left the chamber. Harry swallowed.

"How exactly do they sort us into Houses?" he asked

Ron.

"Some sort of test, I think. Fred said it hurts a lot, but

I think he was joking."

Harry's heart gave a horrible jolt. A test? In front of

the whole school? But he didn't know any magic yet

- what on earth would he have to do? He hadn't

expected something like this the moment they

arrived. He looked around anxiously and saw that

everyone else looked terrified, too. No one was talking

much except Hermione Granger, who was whispering

very fast about all the spells she'd learned and

wondering which one she'd need. Harry tried hard not

to listen to her. He'd never been more nervous, never,

not even when he'd had to take a school report home

to the Dursleys saying that he'd somehow turned his

teachers wig blue. He kept his eyes fixed on the door.

Any second now, Professor McGonagall would come

back and lead him to his doom.

Then something happened that made him jump about

a foot in the air - several people behind him

screamed.

"What the - ?"

He gasped. So did the people around him. About

twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back

wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they

glided across the room talking to one another and

hardly glancing at the first years. They seemed to be

arguing. What looked like a fat little monk was

saying: "Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give

him a second chance - "

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the

chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and

you know, he's not really even a ghost - I say, what

are you all doing here?"

A ghost wearing a ruff and tights had suddenly

noticed the first years.

Nobody answered.

"New students!" said the Fat Friar, smiling around at

them. "About to be Sorted, I suppose?"

A few people nodded mutely.

"Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!" said the Friar. "My old

House, you know."

"Move along now," said a sharp voice. "The Sorting

Ceremony's about to start."

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the

ghosts floated away through the opposite wall.

"Now, form a line," Professor McGonagall told the first

years, "and follow me."

Feeling oddly as though his legs had turned to lead,

Harry got into line behind a boy with sandy hair, with

Ron behind him, and they walked out of the chamber,

back across the hall, and through a pair of double

doors into the Great Hall.

Harry had never even imagined such a strange and

splendid place. It was lit by thousands and thousands

of candles that were floating in midair over four long

tables, where the rest of the students were sitting.

These tables were laid with glittering golden plates

and goblets. At the top of the hall was another long

table where the teachers were sitting. Professor

McGonagall led the first years up here, so that they

came to a halt in a line facing the other students,

with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces

staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the

flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among

the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to

avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked upward and

saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard

Hermione whisper, "It's bewitched to look like the sky

outside. I read about it in Hogwarts, A History."

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all,

and that the Great Hall didn't simply open on to the

heavens.

Harry quickly looked down again as Professor

McGonagall silently placed a four-legged stool in front

of the first years. On top of the stool she put a pointed

wizard's hat. This hat was patched and frayed and

extremely dirty. Aunt Petunia wouldn't have let it in

the house.

Maybe they had to try and get a rabbit out of it, Harry

thought wildly, that seemed the sort of thing -

noticing that everyone in the hall was now staring at

the hat, he stared at it, too. For a few seconds, there

was complete silence. Then the hat twitched. A rip

near the brim opened wide like a mouth - and the

hat began to sing:

"Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,

But don't judge on what you see,

I'll eat myself if you can find

A smarter hat than me.

You can keep your bowlers black,

Your top hats sleek and tall,

For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat

And I can cap them all.

There's nothing hidden in your head

The Sorting Hat can't see,

So try me on and I will tell you

Where you ought to be.

You might belong in Gryffindor,

Where dwell the brave at heart,

Their daring, nerve, and chivalry

Set Gryffindors apart;

You might belong in Hufflepuff,

Where they are just and loyal,

Those patient Hufflepuffs are true

And unafraid of toil;

Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,

If you've a ready mind,

Where those of wit and learning,

Will always find their kind;

Or perhaps in Slytherin

You'll make your real friends,

Those cunning folk use any means

To achieve their ends.

So put me on! Don't be afraid l\

And don't get in a flap\

You're in safe hands (though I have none)

For I'm a Thinking Cap\"

The whole hall burst into applause as the hat finished

its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then

became quite still again.

"So we've just got to try on the hat!" Ron whispered to

Harry. "I'll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling

a troll."

Harry smiled weakly. Yes, trying on the hat was a lot

better than having to do a spell, but he did wish they

could have tried it on without everyone watching. The

hat seemed to be asking rather a lot; Harry didn't feel

brave or quick-witted or any of it at the moment. If

only the hat had mentioned a House for people who

felt a bit queasy, that would have been the one for

him.

Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a

long roll of parchment.

"When I call your name, you will put on the hat and

sit on the stool to be sorted," she said. "Abbott,

Hannah!"

A pink-faced girl with blonde pigtails stumbled out of

line, put on the hat, which fell right down over her

eyes, and sat down. A moment's pause -

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat.

The table on the right cheered and clapped as

Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table.

Harry saw the ghost of the Fat Friar waving merrily at

her.

"Bones, Susan!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!" shouted the hat again, and Susan

scuttled off to sit next to Hannah.

"Boot, Terry!"

"RAVENCLAW!"

The table second from the left clapped this time;

several Ravenclaws stood up to shake hands with

Terry as he joined them.

"Brocklehurst, Mandy" went to Ravenclaw too, but

"Brown, Lavender" became the first new Gryffindor,

and the table on the far left exploded with cheers;

Harry could see Ron's twin brothers catcalling.

"Bulstrode, Millicent" then became a Slytherin.

Perhaps it was Harry's imagination, after all he'd

heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked

like an unpleasant lot.

He was starting to feel definitely sick now. He

remembered being picked for teams during gym at his

old school. He had always been last to be chosen, not

because he was no good, but because no one wanted

Dudley to think they liked him.

"Finch-Fletchley, Justin!"

"HUFFLEPUFF!"

Sometimes, Harry noticed, the hat shouted out the

House at once, but at others it took a little while to

decide. "Finnigan, Seamus," the sandy-haired boy

next to Harry in the line, sat on the stool for almost a

whole minute before the hat declared him a

Gryffindor.

"Granger, Hermione!"

Hermione almost ran to the stool and jammed the hat

eagerly on her head.

"GRYFFINDOR!" shouted the hat. Ron groaned.

A horrible thought struck Harry, as horrible thoughts

always do when you're very nervous. What if he

wasn't chosen at all? What if he just sat there with

the hat over his eyes for ages, until Professor

McGonagall jerked it off his head and said there had

obviously been a mistake and he'd better get back on

the train?

When Neville Longbottom, the boy who kept losing his

toad, was called, he fell over on his way to the stool.

The hat took a long time to decide with Neville. When

it finally shouted, "GRYFFINDOR," Neville ran off still

wearing it, and had to jog back amid gales of laughter

to give it to "MacDougal, Morag."

Malfoy swaggered forward when his name was called

and got his wish at once: the hat had barely touched

his head when it screamed, "SLYTHERIN!"

Malfoy went to join his friends Crabbe and Goyle,

looking pleased with himself.

There weren't many people left now.

"Moon" , "Nott" ... , "Parkinson" ... , then a pair of

twin girls, "Path" and "Path" ... , then "Perks, Sally-

Anne" . . . , and then, at last -

"Potter, Harry!"

As Harry stepped forward, whispers suddenly broke

out like little hissing fires all over the hall.

" Potter , did she say?"

" The Harry Potter?"

The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over

his eyes was the hall full of people craning to get a

good look at him. Next second he was looking at the

black inside of the hat. He waited.

"Hmm," said a small voice in his ear. "Difficult. Very

difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind

either. There's talent, oh my goodness, yes - and a

nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting. ...

So where shall I put you?"

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, Not

Slytherin, not Slytherin.

"Not Slytherin, eh?" said the small voice. "Are you

sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in

your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to

greatness, no doubt about that - no? Well, if you're

sure - better be GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry heard the hat shout the last word to the whole

hall. He took off the hat and walked shakily toward

the Gryffindor table. He was so relieved to have been

chosen and not put in Slytherin, he hardly noticed

that he was getting the loudest cheer yet. Percy the

Prefect got up and shook his hand vigorously, while

the Weasley twins yelled, "We got Potter! We got

Potter!" Harry sat down opposite the ghost in the ruff

he'd seen earlier. The ghost patted his arm, giving

Harry the sudden, horrible feeling he'd just plunged it

into a bucket of ice-cold water.

He could see the High Table properly now. At the end

nearest him sat Hagrid, who caught his eye and gave

him the thumbs up. Harry grinned back. And there,

in the center of the High Table, in a large gold chair,

sat Albus Dumbledore. Harry recognized him at once

from the card he'd gotten out of the Chocolate Frog on

the train. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing

in the whole hall that shone as brightly as the ghosts.

Harry spotted Professor Quirrell, too, the nervous

young man from the Leaky Cauldron. He was looking

very peculiar in a large purple turban.

And now there were only four people left to be sorted.

"Thomas, Dean," a Black boy even taller than Ron,

joined Harry at the Gryffindor table. "Turpin, Lisa,"

became a Ravenclaw and then it was Ron's turn. He

was pale green by now. Harry crossed his fingers

under the table and a second later the hat had

shouted, "GRYFFINDOR!"

Harry clapped loudly with the rest as Ron collapsed

into the chair next to him.

"Well done, Ron, excellent," said Percy Weasley

pompously across Harry as "Zabini, Blaise," was

made a Slytherin. Professor McGonagall rolled up her

scroll and took the Sorting Hat away.

Harry looked down at his empty gold plate. He had

only just realized how hungry he was. The pumpkin

pasties seemed ages ago.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was

beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if

nothing could have pleased him more than to see

them all there.

"Welcome!" he said. "Welcome to a new year at

Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like

to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit!

Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!

"Thank you!"

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered.

Harry didn't know whether to laugh or not.

"Is he - a bit mad?" he asked Percy uncertainly.

"Mad?" said Percy airily. "He's a genius! Best wizard

in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes. Potatoes,

Harry?"

Harry's mouth fell open. The dishes in front of him

were now piled with food. He had never seen so many

things he liked to eat on one table: roast beef, roast

chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages,

bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes,

fries, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy,

ketchup, and, for some strange reason, peppermint

humbugs.

The Dursleys had never exactly starved Harry, but

he'd never been allowed to eat as much as he liked.

Dudley had always taken anything that Harry really

wanted, even if it made him sick. Harry piled his plate

with a bit of everything except the peppermints and

began to eat. It was all delicious.

"That does look good," said the ghost in the ruff sadly,

watching Harry cut up his steak.

"Can't you - ?"

"I haven't eaten for nearly five hundred years," said

the ghost. "I don't need to, of course, but one does

miss it. I don't think I've introduced myself? Sir

Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service.

Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower."

"I know who you are!" said Ron suddenly. "My

brothers told me about you - you're Nearly Headless

Nick!"

"I would prefer you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy

- " the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus

Finnigan interrupted.

"Nearly Headless? How can you be nearly headless?"

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little

chat wasn't going at all the way he wanted.

"Like this," he said irritably. He seized his left ear and

pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell

onto his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone

had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it

properly. Looking pleased at the stunned looks on

their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head

back onto his neck, coughed, and said, "So - new

Gryffindors! I hope you're going to help us win the

House Championship this year? Gryffindors have

never gone so long without winning. Slytherins have

got the cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron's

becoming almost unbearable - he's the Slytherin

ghost."

Harry looked over at the Slytherin table and saw a

horrible ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a

gaunt face, and robes stained with silver blood. He

was right next to Malfoy who, Harry was pleased to

see, didn't look too pleased with the seating

arrangements.

"How did he get covered in blood?" asked Seamus

with great interest.

"I've never asked," said Nearly Headless Nick

delicately.

When everyone had eaten as much as they could, the

remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving

them sparkling clean as before. A moment later the

desserts appeared. Blocks of ice cream in every flavor

you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate

eclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, Jell-

0, rice pudding ...

As Harry helped himself to a treacle tart, the talk

turned to their families.

"I'm half-and-half," said Seamus. "Me dad's a Muggle.

Mom didn't tell him she was a witch 'til after they

were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him."

The others laughed.

"What about you, Neville?" said Ron.

"Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch,"

said Neville, "but the family thought I was all- Muggle

for ages. My Great Uncle Algie kept trying to catch me

off my guard and force some magic out of me - he

pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly

drowned - but nothing happened until I was eight.

Great Uncle Algie came round for dinner, and he was

hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles

when my Great Auntie Enid offered him a meringue

and he accidentally let go. But I bounced - all the

way down the garden and into the road. They were all

really pleased, Gran was crying, she was so happy.

And you should have seen their faces when I got in

here - they thought I might not be magic enough to

come, you see. Great Uncle Algie was so pleased he

bought me my toad."

On Harry's other side, Percy Weasley and Hermione

were talking about lessons ("I do hope they start right

away, there's so much to learn, I'm particularly

interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning

something into something else, of course, it's

supposed to be very difficult - "You'll be starting

small, just matches into needles and that sort of

thing - ").

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy,

looked up at the High Table again. Hagrid was

drinking deeply from his goblet. Professor McGonagall

was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Professor

Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a

teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose, and

sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher

looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's

eyes - and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on

Harry's forehead.

"Ouch!" Harry clapped a hand to his head.

"What is it?" asked Percy.

"N-nothing."

The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder

to shake off was the feeling Harry had gotten from the

teacher's look - a feeling that he didn't like Harry at

all.

"Who's that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?" he

asked Percy.

"Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder

he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He

teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to - everyone

knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot

about the Dark Arts, Snape."

Harry watched Snape for a while, but Snape didn't

look at him again.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor

Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent.

"Ahem - just a few more words now that we are all

fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to

give you.

"First years should note that the forest on the

grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our

older students would do well to remember that as

well."

Dumbledore 's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction

of the Weasley twins.

"I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to

remind you all that no magic should be used between

classes in the corridors.

"Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of

the term. Anyone interested in playing for their House

teams should contact Madam Hooch.

"And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-

floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds

to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful

death."

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did.

"He's not serious?" he muttered to Percy.

"Must be," said Percy, frowning at Dumbledore. "It's

odd, because he usually gives us a reason why we're

not allowed to go somewhere - the forest's full of

dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he

might have told us prefects, at least."

"And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school

song!" cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other

teachers' smiles had become rather fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick, as if he was

trying to get a fly off the end, and a long golden

ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables

and twisted itself, snakelike, into words.

"Everyone pick their favorite tune," said Dumbledore,

"and off we go!"

And the school bellowed:

"Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,

Teach us something please,

Whether we be old and bald

Or young with scabby knees,

Our heads could do with filling

With some interesting stuff,

For now they're bare and full of air,

Dead flies and bits of fluff,

So teach us things worth knowing,

Bring back what we've forgot,

Just do your best, we'll do the rest,

And learn until our brains all rot."

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last,

only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a

very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their

last few lines with his wand and when they had

finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

"Ah, music," he said, wiping his eyes. "A magic

beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you

trot!"

The Gryffindor first years followed Percy through the

chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall, and up the

marble staircase. Harry's legs were like lead again,

but only because he was so tired and full of food. He

was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in

the portraits along the corridors whispered and

pointed as they passed, or that twice Percy led them

through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and

hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases,

yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry was just

wondering how much farther they had to go when

they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair

ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them

they started throwing themselves at him.

"Peeves," Percy whispered to the first years. "A

poltergeist." He raised his voice, "Peeves - show

yourself."

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a

balloon, answered.

"Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron?"

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark

eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-

legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

"Oooooooh!" he said, with an evil cackle. "Ickle

Firsties! What fun!"

He swooped suddenly at them. They all ducked.

"Go away, Peeves, or the Baron'll hear about this, I

mean it!" barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping

the walking sticks on Neville's head. They heard him

zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

"You want to watch out for Peeves," said Percy, as

they set off again. "The Bloody Baron's the only one

who can control him, he won't even listen to us

prefects. Here we are."

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a

very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

"Password?" she said.

"Caput Draconis," said Percy, and the portrait swung

forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all

scrambled through it - Neville needed a leg up -

and found themselves in the Gryffindor common

room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

Percy directed the girls through one door to their

dormitory and the boys through another. At the top of

a spiral staircase - they were obviously in one of the

towers - they found their beds at last: five four-

posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. Their

trunks had already been brought up. Too tired to talk

much, they pulled on their pajamas and fell into bed.

"Great food, isn't it?" Ron muttered to Harry through

the hangings. "Get off Scabbers! He's chewing my

sheets."

Harry was going to ask Ron if he'd had any of the

treacle tart, but he fell asleep almost at once.

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he

had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor

Quirrell's turban, which kept talking to him, telling

him he must transfer to Slytherin at once, because it

was his destiny. Harry told the turban he didn't want

to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried

to pull it off but it tightened painfully - and there

was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it -

then Malfoy turned into the hook-nosed teacher,

Snape, whose laugh became high and cold - there

was a burst of green light and Harry woke, sweating

and shaking.

He rolled over and fell asleep again, and when he

woke next day, he didn't remember the dream at all.

THE POTIONS MASTER

"There, look."

"Where?"

"Next to the tall kid with the red hair."

"Wearing the glasses?"

"Did you see his face?"

"Did you see his scar?"

Whispers followed Harry from the moment he left his

dormitory the next day. People lining up outside

classrooms stood on tiptoe to get a look at him, or

doubled back to pass him in the corridors again,

staring. Harry wished they wouldn't, because he was

trying to concentrate on finding his way to classes.

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at

Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones;

some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some

with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to

remember to jump. Then there were doors that

wouldn't open unless you asked politely, or tickled

them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren't

really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It

was also very hard to remember where anything was,

because it all seemed to move around a lot. The

people in the portraits kept going to visit each other,

and Harry was sure the coats of armor could walk.

The ghosts didn't help, either. It was always a nasty

shock when one of them glided suddenly through a

door you were trying to open. Nearly Headless Nick

was always happy to point new Gryffindors in the

right direction, but Peeves the Poltergeist was worth

two locked doors and a trick staircase if you met him

when you were late for class. He would drop

wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from

under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak

up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech,

"GOT YOUR CONK!"

Even worse than Peeves, if that was possible, was the

caretaker, Argus Filch. Harry and Ron managed to get

on the wrong side of him on their very first morning.

Filch found them trying to force their way through a

door that unluckily turned out to be the entrance to

the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. He

wouldn't believe they were lost, was sure they were

trying to break into it on purpose, and was

threatening to lock them in the dungeons when they

were rescued by Professor Quirrell, who was passing.

Filch owned a cat called Mrs. Norris, a scrawny, dust-

colored creature with bulging, lamplike eyes just like

Filch's. She patrolled the corridors alone. Break a rule

in front of her, put just one toe out of line, and she'd

whisk off for Filch, who'd appear, wheezing, two

seconds later. Filch knew the secret passageways of

the school better than anyone (except perhaps the

Weasley twins) and could pop up as suddenly as any

of the ghosts. The students all hated him, and it was

the dearest ambition of many to give Mrs. Norris a

good kick.

And then, once you had managed to find them, there

were the classes themselves. There was a lot more to

magic, as Harry quickly found out, than waving your

wand and saying a few funny words.

They had to study the night skies through their

telescopes every Wednesday at midnight and learn

the names of different stars and the movements of the

planets. Three times a week they went out to the

greenhouses behind the castle to study Herbology,

with a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout,

where they learned how to take care of all the strange

plants and fungi, and found out what they were used

for.

Easily the most boring class was History of Magic,

which was the only one taught by a ghost. Professor

Binns had been very old indeed when he had fallen

asleep in front of the staff room fire and got up next

morning to teach, leaving his body behind him. Binns

droned on and on while they scribbled down names

and dates, and got Emeric the Evil and Uric the

Oddball mixed up.

Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was a tiny

little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to

see over his desk. At the start of their first class he

took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name

he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight.

Professor McGonagall was again different. Harry had

been quite right to think she wasn't a teacher to

cross. Strict and clever, she gave them a talking- to

the moment they sat down in her first class.

"Transfiguration is some of the most complex and

dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts," she

said. "Anyone messing around in my class will leave

and not come back. You have been warned."

Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again.

They were all very impressed and couldn't wait to get

started, but soon realized they weren't going to be

changing the furniture into animals for a long time.

After taking a lot of complicated notes, they were each

given a match and started trying to turn it into a

needle. By the end of the lesson, only Hermione

Granger had made any difference to her match;

Professor McGonagall showed the class how it had

gone all silver and pointy and gave Hermione a rare

smile.

The class everyone had really been looking forward to

was Defense Against the Dark Arts, but Quirrell's

lessons turned out to be a bit of a joke. His classroom

smelled strongly of garlic, which everyone said was to

ward off a vampire he'd met in Romania and was

afraid would be coming back to get him one of these

days. His turban, he told them, had been given to him

by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of

a troublesome zombie, but they weren't sure they

believed this story. For one thing, when Seamus

Finnigan asked eagerly to hear how Quirrell had

fought off the zombie, Quirrell went pink and started

talking about the weather; for another, they had

noticed that a funny smell hung around the turban,

and the Weasley twins insisted that it was stuffed full

of garlic as well, so that Quirrell was protected

wherever he went.

Harry was very relieved to find out that he wasn't

miles behind everyone else. Lots of people had come

from Muggle families and, like him, hadn't had any

idea that they were witches and wizards. There was so

much to learn that even people like Ron didn't have

much of a head start.

Friday was an important day for Harry and Ron. They

finally managed to find their way down to the Great

Hall for breakfast without getting lost once.

"What have we got today?" Harry asked Ron as he

poured sugar on his porridge.

"Double Potions with the Slytherins," said Ron.

"Snape's Head of Slytherin House. They say he always

favors them - we'll be able to see if it's true."

"Wish McGonagall favored us," said Harry. Professor

McGonagall was head of Gryffindor House, but it

hadn't stopped her from giving them a huge pile of

homework the day before.

Just then, the mail arrived. Harry had gotten used to

this by now, but it had given him a bit of a shock on

the first morning, when about a hundred owls had

suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during

breakfast, circling the tables until they saw their

owners, and dropping letters and packages onto their

laps.

Hedwig hadn't brought Harry anything so far. She

sometimes flew in to nibble his ear and have a bit of

toast before going off to sleep in the owlery with the

other school owls. This morning, however, she

fluttered down between the marmalade and the sugar

bowl and dropped a note onto Harry's plate. Harry

tore it open at once. It said, in a very untidy scrawl:

Dear Harry,

I know you get Friday afternoons off so would you like

to come and have a cup of tea with me around three?

I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an

answer back with Hedwig.

Hagrid

Harry borrowed Ron's quill, scribbled Yes, please, see

you later on the back of the note, and sent Hedwig off

again.

It was lucky that Harry had tea with Hagrid to look

forward to, because the Potions lesson turned out to

be the worst thing that had happened to him so far.

At the start-of-term banquet, Harry had gotten the

idea that Professor Snape disliked him. By the end of

the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong.

Snape didn't dislike Harry - he hated him.

Potions lessons took place down in one of the

dungeons. It was colder here than up in the main

castle, and would have been quite creepy enough

without the pickled animals floating in glass jars all

around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the

roll call, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name.

"Ah, yes," he said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new -

celebrity."

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle

sniggered behind their hands. Snape finished calling

the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were

black like Hagrid 's, but they had none of Hagrid 's

warmth. They were cold and empty and made you

think of dark tunnels.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art

of potion-making," he began. He spoke in barely more

than a whisper, but they caught every word - like

Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a

class silent without effort. "As there is little foolish

wand- waving here, many of you will hardly believe

this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand

the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its

shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that

creep through human veins, bewitching the mind,

ensnaring the senses. ... I can teach you how to bottle

fame, brew glory, even stopper death - if you aren't

as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to

teach."

More silence followed this little speech. Harry and

Ron exchanged looks with raised eyebrows. Hermione

Granger was on the edge of her seat and looked

desperate to start proving that she wasn't a

dunderhead.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I

added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of

wormwood?"

Powdered root of what to an infusion of what? Harry

glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was;

Hermione 's hand had shot into the air.

"I don't know, sir," said Harry.

Snape 's lips curled into a sneer.

"Tut, tut - fame clearly isn't everything."

He ignored Hermione 's hand.

"Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told

you to find me a bezoar?"

Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it

would go without her leaving her seat, but Harry

didn't have the faintest idea what a bezoar was. He

tried not to look at Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle, who

were shaking with laughter.

"I don't know, sir."

"Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming,

eh, Potter?"

Harry forced himself to keep looking straight into

those cold eyes. He had looked through his books at

the Dursleys', but did Snape expect him to remember

everything in One Thousand Magical Herbs and

Fungi ?

Snape was still ignoring Hermione's quivering hand.

"What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood

and wolfsbane?"

At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching

toward the dungeon ceiling.

"I don't know," said Harry quietly. "I think Hermione

does, though, why don't you try her?"

A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus's eye,

and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not

pleased.

"Sit down," he snapped at Hermione. "For your

information, Potter, asphodel and wormwood make a

sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the

Draught of Living Death. A bezoar is a stone taken

from the stomach of a goat and it will save you from

most poisons. As for monkshood and wolfsbane, they

are the same plant, which also goes by the name of

aconite. Well? Why aren't you all copying that down?"

There was a sudden rummaging for quills and

parchment. Over the noise, Snape said, "And a point

will be taken from Gryffindor House for your cheek,

Potter."

Things didn't improve for the Gryffindors as the

Potions lesson continued. Snape put them all into

pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to

cure boils. He swept around in his long black cloak,

watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake

fangs, criticizing almost everyone except Malfoy,

whom he seemed to like. He was just telling everyone

to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his

horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a

loud hissing filled the dungeon. Neville had somehow

managed to melt Seamus's cauldron into a twisted

blob, and their potion was seeping across the stone

floor, burning holes in people's shoes. Within

seconds, the whole class was standing on their stools

while Neville, who had been drenched in the potion

when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as

angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

"Idiot boy!" snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion

away with one wave of his wand. "I suppose you

added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron

off the fire?"

Neville whimpered as boils started to pop up all over

his nose.

"Take him up to the hospital wing," Snape spat at

Seamus. Then he rounded on Harry and Ron, who

had been working next to Neville.

"You - Potter - why didn't you tell him not to add

the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got

it wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for

Gryffindor."

This was so unfair that Harry opened his mouth to

argue, but Ron kicked him behind their cauldron.

"Don't push it," he muttered, "I've heard Snape can

turn very nasty."

As they climbed the steps out of the dungeon an hour

later, Harry's mind was racing and his spirits were

low. He'd lost two points for Gryffindor in his very

first week - why did Snape hate him so much?

"Cheer up," said Ron, "Snape's always taking points

off Fred and George. Can I come and meet Hagrid

with you?"

At five to three they left the castle and made their way

across the grounds. Hagrid lived in a small wooden

house on the edge of the forbidden forest. A crossbow

and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Harry knocked they heard a frantic scrabbling

from inside and several booming barks. Then Hagrid 's

voice rang out, saying, "Back, Fang - back."

Hagrid 's big, hairy face appeared in the crack as he

pulled the door open.

"Hang on," he said. "Back, Fang."

He let them in, struggling to keep a hold on the collar

of an enormous black boarhound.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants

were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was

boiling on the open fire, and in the corner stood a

massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

"Make yerselves at home," said Hagrid, letting go of

Fang, who bounded straight at Ron and started

licking his ears. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as

fierce as he looked.

"This is Ron," Harry told Hagrid, who was pouring

boiling water into a large teapot and putting rock

cakes onto a plate.

"Another Weasley, eh?" said Hagrid, glancing at Ron's

freckles. "I spent half me life chasin' yer twin brothers

away from the forest."

The rock cakes were shapeless lumps with raisins

that almost broke their teeth, but Harry and Ron

pretended to be enjoying them as they told Hagrid all

about their first lessons. Fang rested his head on

Harry's knee and drooled all over his robes.

Harry and Ron were delighted to hear Hagrid call

Filch "that old git."

"An' as fer that cat, Mrs. Norris, I'd like ter introduce

her to Fang sometime. D'yeh know, every time I go up

ter the school, she follows me everywhere? Can't get

rid of her - Filch puts her up to it."

Harry told Hagrid about Snape's lesson. Hagrid, like

Ron, told Harry not to worry about it, that Snape

liked hardly any of the students.

"But he seemed to really hate me."

"Rubbish!" said Hagrid. "Why should he?"

Yet Harry couldn't help thinking that Hagrid didn't

quite meet his eyes when he said that.

"How's yer brother Charlie?" Hagrid asked Ron. "I

liked him a lot - great with animals."

Harry wondered if Hagrid had changed the subject on

purpose. While Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie's

work with dragons, Harry picked up a piece of paper

that was lying on the table under the tea cozy. It was

a cutting from the Daily Prophet :

GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST

Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringotts

on 3 1 July, widely believed to be the work of Dark

wizards or witches unknown.

Gringotts goblins today insisted that nothing had

been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact

been emptied the same day.

"But we're not telling you what was in there, so keep

your noses out if you know what's good for you," said

a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

Harry remembered Ron telling him on the train that

someone had tried to rob Gringotts, but Ron hadn't

mentioned the date.

"Hagrid!" said Harry, "that Gringotts break-in

happened on my birthday! It might've been happening

while we were there!"

There was no doubt about it, Hagrid definitely didn't

meet Harry's eyes this time. He grunted and offered

him another rock cake. Harry read the story again.

The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied

earlier that same day. Hagrid had emptied vault seven

hundred and thirteen, if you could call it emptying,

taking out that grubby little package. Had that been

what the thieves were looking for?

As Harry and Ron walked back to the castle for

dinner, their pockets weighed down with rock cakes

they'd been too polite to refuse, Harry thought that

none of the lessons he'd had so far had given him as

much to think about as tea with Hagrid. Had Hagrid

collected that package just in time? Where was it

now? And did Hagrid know something about Snape

that he didn't want to tell Harry?

9

THE MIDNIGHT DUEL

Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he

hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met

Draco Malfoy. Still, first-year Gryffindors only had

Potions with the Slytherins, so they didn't have to put

up with Malfoy much. Or at least, they didn't until

they spotted a notice pinned up in the Gryffindor

common room that made them all groan. Flying

lessons would be starting on Thursday - and

Gryffindor and Slytherin would be learning together.

"Typical," said Harry darkly. "Just what I always

wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in

front of Malfoy."

He had been looking forward to learning to fly more

than anything else.

"You don't know that you'll make a fool of yourself,"

said Ron reasonably. "Anyway, I know Malfoy's always

going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet

that's all talk."

Malfoy certainly did talk about flying a lot. He

complained loudly about first years never getting on

the House Quidditch teams and told long, boastful

stories that always seemed to end with him narrowly

escaping Muggles in helicopters. He wasn't the only

one, though: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd

spent most of his childhood zooming around the

countryside on his broomstick. Even Ron would tell

anyone who'd listen about the time he'd almost hit a

hang glider on Charlie's old broom. Everyone from

wizarding families talked about Quidditch constantly.

Ron had already had a big argument with Dean

Thomas, who shared their dormitory, about soccer.

Ron couldn't see what was exciting about a game with

only one ball where no one was allowed to fly. Harry

had caught Ron prodding Dean's poster of West Ham

soccer team, trying to make the players move.

Neville had never been on a broomstick in his life,

because his grandmother had never let him near one.

Privately, Harry felt she'd had good reason, because

Neville managed to have an extraordinary number of

accidents even with both feet on the ground.

Hermione Granger was almost as nervous about

flying as Neville was. This was something you couldn't

learn by heart out of a book - not that she hadn't

tried. At breakfast on Thursday she bored them all

stupid with flying tips she'd gotten out of a library

book called Quidditch Through the Ages. Neville was

hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything

that might help him hang on to his broomstick later,

but everybody else was very pleased when Hermione 's

lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the mail.

Harry hadn't had a single letter since Hagrid's note,

something that Malfoy had been quick to notice, of

course. Malfoy 's eagle owl was always bringing him

packages of sweets from home, which he opened

gloatingly at the Slytherin table.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his

grandmother. He opened it excitedly and showed

them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which

seemed to be full of white smoke.

"It's a Remembrall!" he explained. "Gran knows I

forget things - this tells you if there's something

you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this

and if it turns red - oh ..." His face fell, because the

Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, "... you've

forgotten something ..."

Neville was trying to remember what he'd forgotten

when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the Gryffindor

table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Harry and Ron jumped to their feet. They were half

hoping for a reason to fight Malfoy, but Professor

McGonagall, who could spot trouble quicker than any

teacher in the school, was there in a flash.

"What's going on?"

"Malfoy's got my Remembrall, Professor."

Scowling, Malfoy quickly dropped the Remembrall

back on the table.

"Just looking," he said, and he sloped away with

Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

At three-thirty that afternoon, Harry, Ron, and the

other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps onto

the grounds for their first flying lesson. It was a clear,

breezy day, and the grass rippled under their feet as

they marched down the sloping lawns toward a

smooth, flat lawn on the opposite side of the grounds

to the forbidden forest, whose trees were swaying

darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty

broomsticks lying in neat lines on the ground. Harry

had heard Fred and George Weasley complain about

the school brooms, saying that some of them started

to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly

to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short,

gray hair, and yellow eyes like a hawk.

"Well, what are you all waiting for?" she barked.

"Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry

up." "

Harry glanced down at his broom. It was old and

some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles.

"Stick out your right hand over your broom," called

Madam Hooch at the front, "and say ‘Up!' "

"UP!" everyone shouted.

Harry's broom jumped into his hand at once, but it

was one of the few that did. Hermione Granger's had

simply rolled over on the ground, and Neville's hadn't

moved at all. Perhaps brooms, like horses, could tell

when you were afraid, thought Harry; there was a

quaver in Neville's voice that said only too clearly that

he wanted to keep his feet on the ground.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their

brooms without sliding off the end, and walked up

and down the rows correcting their grips. Harry and

Ron were delighted when she told Malfoy he'd been

doing it wrong for years.

"Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the

ground, hard," said Madam Hooch. "Keep your

brooms steady, rise a few feet, and then come straight

back down by leaning forward slightly. On my whistle

- three - two - "

But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of

being left on the ground, pushed off hard before the

whistle had touched Madam Hooch's lips.

"Come back, boy!" she shouted, but Neville was rising

straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle - twelve

feet - twenty feet. Harry saw his scared white face

look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp,

slip sideways off the broom and -

WHAM - a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay

facedown on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was

still rising higher and higher, and started to drift

lazily toward the forbidden forest and out of sight.

Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, her face as

white as his.

"Broken wrist," Harry heard her mutter. "Come on,

boy - it's all right, up you get."

She turned to the rest of the class.

"None of you is to move while I take this boy to the

hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are

or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say

‘Quidditch.' Come on, dear."

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist,

hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm

around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst

into laughter.

"Did you see his face, the great lump?"

The other Slytherins joined in.

"Shut up, Malfoy," snapped Parvati Patil.

"Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?" said Pansy

Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. "Never thought

you'd like fat little crybabies, Parvati."

"Look!" said Malfoy, darting forward and snatching

something out of the grass. "It's that stupid thing

Longbottom's gran sent him."

The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

"Give that here, Malfoy," said Harry quietly. Everyone

stopped talking to watch.

Malfoy smiled nastily.

"I think I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to find

- how about - up a tree?"

"Give it here!" Harry yelled, but Malfoy had leapt onto

his broomstick and taken off. He hadn't been lying, he

could fly well. Hovering level with the topmost

branches of an oak he called, "Come and get it,

Potter!"

Harry grabbed his broom.

"iVo!" shouted Hermione Granger. "Madam Hooch told

us not to move - you'll get us all into trouble."

Harry ignored her. Blood was pounding in his ears.

He mounted the broom and kicked hard against the

ground and up, up he soared; air rushed through his

hair, and his robes whipped out behind him - and in

a rush of fierce joy he realized he'd found something

he could do without being taught - this was easy,

this was wonderful. He pulled his broomstick up a

little to take it even higher, and heard screams and

gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring

whoop from Ron.

He turned his broomstick sharply to face Malfoy in

midair. Malfoy looked stunned.

"Give it here," Harry called, "or I'll knock you off that

broom!"

"Oh, yeah?" said Malfoy, trying to sneer, but looking

worried.

Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leaned forward

and grasped the broom tightly in both hands, and it

shot toward Malfoy like a javelin. Malfoy only just got

out of the way in time; Harry made a sharp about-

face and held the broom steady. A few people below

were clapping.

"No Crabbe and Goyle up here to save your neck,

Malfoy," Harry called.

The same thought seemed to have struck Malfoy.

"Catch it if you can, then!" he shouted, and he threw

the glass ball high into the air and streaked back

toward the ground.

Harry saw, as though in slow motion, the ball rise up

in the air and then start to fall. He leaned forward

and pointed his broom handle down - next second

he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball

- wind whistled in his ears, mingled with the

screams of people watching - he stretched out his

hand - a foot from the ground he caught it, just in

time to pull his broom straight, and he toppled gently

onto the grass with the Remembrall clutched safely in

his fist.

"HARRY POTTER!"

His heart sank faster than he'd just dived. Professor

McGonagall was running toward them. He got to his

feet, trembling.

"Never - in all my time at Hogwarts - "

Professor McGonagall was almost speechless with

shock, and her glasses flashed furiously, " - how dare

you - might have broken your neck - "

"It wasn't his fault, Professor - "

"Be quiet, Miss Patil - "

"But Malfoy - "

"That's enough, Mr. Weasley. Potter, follow me, now."

Harry caught sight of Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle's

triumphant faces as he left, walking numbly in

Professor McGonagall's wake as she strode toward the

castle. He was going to be expelled, he just knew it.

He wanted to say something to defend himself, but

there seemed to be something wrong with his voice.

Professor McGonagall was sweeping along without

even looking at him; he had to jog to keep up. Now

he'd done it. He hadn't even lasted two weeks. He'd be

packing his bags in ten minutes. What would the

Dursleys say when he turned up on the doorstep?

Up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside,

and still Professor McGonagall didn't say a word to

him. She wrenched open doors and marched along

corridors with Harry trotting miserably behind her.

Maybe she was taking him to Dumbledore. He

thought of Hagrid, expelled but allowed to stay on as

gamekeeper. Perhaps he could be Hagrid's assistant.

His stomach twisted as he imagined it, watching Ron

and the others becoming wizards while he stumped

around the grounds carrying Hagrid's bag.

Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom.

She opened the door and poked her head inside.

"Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood

for a moment?"

Wood? thought Harry, bewildered; was Wood a cane

she was going to use on him?

But Wood turned out to be a person, a burly fifth-year

boy who came out of Flitwick's class looking

confused.

"Follow me, you two," said Professor McGonagall, and

they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking

curiously at Harry.

"In here."

Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom

that was empty except for Peeves, who was busy

writing rude words on the blackboard.

"Out, Peeves!" she barked. Peeves threw the chalk

into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out

cursing. Professor McGonagall slammed the door

behind him and turned to face the two boys.

"Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood - I've found you a

Seeker."

Wood's expression changed from puzzlement to

delight.

"Are you serious, Professor?"

"Absolutely," said Professor McGonagall crisply. "The

boy's a natural. I've never seen anything like it. Was

that your first time on a broomstick, Potter?"

Harry nodded silently. He didn't have a clue what was

going on, but he didn't seem to be being expelled, and

some of the feeling started coming back to his legs.

"He caught that thing in his hand after a fifty-foot

dive," Professor McGonagall told Wood. "Didn't even

scratch himself. Charlie Weasley couldn't have done

it."

Wood was now looking as though all his dreams had

come true at once.

"Ever seen a game of Quidditch, Potter?" he asked

excitedly.

"Wood's captain of the Gryffindor team," Professor

McGonagall explained.

"He's just the build for a Seeker, too," said Wood, now

walking around Harry and staring at him. "Light -

speedy - we'll have to get him a decent broom,

Professor - a Nimbus Two Thousand or a

Cleansweep Seven, I'd say."

"I shall speak to Professor Dumbledore and see if we

can't bend the first-year rule. Heaven knows, we need

a better team than last year. Flattened in that last

match by Slytherin, I couldn't look Severus Snape in

the face for weeks. ..."

Professor McGonagall peered sternly over her glasses

at Harry.

"I want to hear you're training hard, Potter, or I may

change my mind about punishing you."

Then she suddenly smiled.

"Your father would have been proud," she said. "He

was an excellent Quidditch player himself."

"You're joking."

It was dinnertime. Harry had just finished telling Ron

what had happened when he'd left the grounds with

Professor McGonagall. Ron had a piece of steak and

kidney pie halfway to his mouth, but he'd forgotten all

about it.

"Seeker?" he said. "But first years never - you must

be the youngest House player in about - "

" - a century," said Harry, shoveling pie into his

mouth. He felt particularly hungry after the

excitement of the afternoon. "Wood told me."

Ron was so amazed, so impressed, he just sat and

gaped at Harry.

"I start training next week," said Harry. "Only don't

tell anyone, Wood wants to keep it a secret."

Fred and George Weasley now came into the hall,

spotted Harry, and hurried over.

"Well done," said George in a low voice. "Wood told us.

We're on the team too - Beaters."

"I tell you, we're going to win that Quidditch Cup for

sure this year," said Fred. "We haven't won since

Charlie left, but this year's team is going to be

brilliant. You must be good, Harry, Wood was almost

skipping when he told us."

"Anyway, we've got to go, Lee Jordan reckons he's

found a new secret passageway out of the school."

"Bet it's that one behind the statue of Gregory the

Smarmy that we found in our first week. See you."

Fred and George had hardly disappeared when

someone far less welcome turned up: Malfoy, flanked

by Crabbe and Goyle.

"Having a last meal, Potter? When are you getting the

train back to the Muggles?"

"You're a lot braver now that you're back on the

ground and you've got your little friends with you,"

said Harry coolly. There was of course nothing at all

little about Crabbe and Goyle, but as the High Table

was full of teachers, neither of them could do more

than crack their knuckles and scowl.

"I'd take you on anytime on my own," said Malfoy.

"Tonight, if you want. Wizard's duel. Wands only -

no contact. What's the matter? Never heard of a

wizard's duel before, I suppose?"

"Of course he has," said Ron, wheeling around. "I'm

his second, who's yours?"

Malfoy looked at Crabbe and Goyle, sizing them up.

"Crabbe," he said. "Midnight all right? Well meet you

in the trophy room; that's always unlocked."

When Malfoy had gone, Ron and Harry looked at each

other.

"What is a wizard's duel?" said Harry. "And what do

you mean, you're my second?"

"Well, a second's there to take over if you die," said

Ron casually, getting started at last on his cold pie.

Catching the look on Harry's face, he added quickly,

"But people only die in proper duels, you know, with

real wizards. The most you and Malfoy'll be able to do

is send sparks at each other. Neither of you knows

enough magic to do any real damage. I bet he

expected you to refuse, anyway."

"And what if I wave my wand and nothing happens?"

"Throw it away and punch him on the nose," Ron

suggested.

"Excuse me."

They both looked up. It was Hermione Granger.

"Can't a person eat in peace in this place?" said Ron.

Hermione ignored him and spoke to Harry.

"I couldn't help overhearing what you and Malfoy

were saying - "

"Bet you could," Ron muttered.

" - and you mustn't go wandering around the school

at night, think of the points you'll lose Gryffindor if

you're caught, and you're bound to be. It's really very

selfish of you."

"And it's really none of your business," said Harry.

"Good-bye," said Ron.

All the same, it wasn't what you'd call the perfect end

to the day, Harry thought, as he lay awake much later

listening to Dean and Seamus falling asleep (Neville

wasn't back from the hospital wing). Ron had spent

all evening giving him advice such as "If he tries to

curse you, you'd better dodge it, because I can't

remember how to block them." There was a very good

chance they were going to get caught by Filch or Mrs.

Norris, and Harry felt he was pushing his luck,

breaking another school rule today. On the other

hand, Malfoy's sneering face kept looming up out of

the darkness - this was his big chance to beat

Malfoy face-to-face. He couldn't miss it.

"Half-past eleven," Ron muttered at last, "we'd better

go."

They pulled on their bathrobes, picked up their

wands, and crept across the tower room, down the

spiral staircase, and into the Gryffindor common

room. A few embers were still glowing in the fireplace,

turning all the armchairs into hunched black

shadows. They had almost reached the portrait hole

when a voice spoke from the chair nearest them, "I

can't believe you're going to do this, Harry."

A lamp flickered on. It was Hermione Granger,

wearing a pink bathrobe and a frown.

"You!" said Ron furiously. "Go back to bed!"

"I almost told your brother," Hermione snapped,

"Percy - he's a prefect, he'd put a stop to this."

Harry couldn't believe anyone could be so interfering.

"Come on," he said to Ron. He pushed open the

portrait of the Fat Lady and climbed through the hole.

Hermione wasn't going to give up that easily. She

followed Ron through the portrait hole, hissing at

them like an angry goose.

"Don't you care about Gryffindor, do you only care

about yourselves, / don't want Slytherin to win the

House Cup, and you'll lose all the points I got from

Professor McGonagall for knowing about Switching

Spells."

"Go away."

"All right, but I warned you, you just remember what

I said when you're on the train home tomorrow,

you're so - "

But what they were, they didn't find out. Hermione

had turned to the portrait of the Fat Lady to get back

inside and found herself facing an empty painting.

The Fat Lady had gone on a nighttime visit and

Hermione was locked out of Gryffindor Tower.

"Now what am I going to do?" she asked shrilly.

"That's your problem," said Ron. "We've got to go,

we're going to be late."

They hadn't even reached the end of the corridor

when Hermione caught up with them.

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"You are not."

"D'you think I'm going to stand out here and wait for

Filch to catch me? If he finds all three of us I'll tell

him the truth, that I was trying to stop you, and you

can back me up."

"You've got some nerve - " said Ron loudly.

"Shut up, both of you!" said Harry sharply. "I heard

something."

It was a sort of snuffling.

"Mrs. Norris?" breathed Ron, squinting through the

dark.

It wasn't Mrs. Norris. It was Neville. He was curled up

on the floor, fast asleep, but jerked suddenly awake

as they crept nearer.

"Thank goodness you found me! I've been out here for

hours, I couldn't remember the new password to get

in to bed."

"Keep your voice down, Neville. The password's ‘Pig

snout' but it won't help you now, the Fat Lady's gone

off somewhere."

"How's your arm?" said Harry.

"Fine," said Neville, showing them. "Madam Pomfrey

mended it in about a minute."

"Good - well, look, Neville, we've got to be

somewhere, we'll see you later - "

"Don't leave me!" said Neville, scrambling to his feet,

"I don't want to stay here alone, the Bloody Baron's

been past twice already."

Ron looked at his watch and then glared furiously at

Hermione and Neville.

"If either of you get us caught, I'll never rest until I've

learned that Curse of the Bogies Quirrell told us

about, and used it on you."

Hermione opened her mouth, perhaps to tell Ron

exactly how to use the Curse of the Bogies, but Harry

hissed at her to be quiet and beckoned them all

forward.

They flitted along corridors striped with bars of

moonlight from the high windows. At every turn Harry

expected to run into Filch or Mrs. Norris, but they

were lucky. They sped up a staircase to the third floor

and tiptoed toward the trophy room.

Malfoy and Crabbe weren't there yet. The crystal

trophy cases glimmered where the moonlight caught

them. Cups, shields, plates, and statues winked silver

and gold in the darkness. They edged along the walls,

keeping their eyes on the doors at either end of the

room. Harry took out his wand in case Malfoy leapt in

and started at once. The minutes crept by.

"He's late, maybe he's chickened out," Ron whispered.

Then a noise in the next room made them jump.

Harry had only just raised his wand when they heard

someone speak - and it wasn't Malfoy.

"Sniff around, my sweet, they might be lurking in a

corner."

It was Filch speaking to Mrs. Norris. Horror-struck,

Harry waved madly at the other three to follow him as

quickly as possible; they scurried silently toward the

door, away from Filch's voice. Neville's robes had

barely whipped round the corner when they heard

Filch enter the trophy room.

"They're in here somewhere," they heard him mutter,

"probably hiding."

"This way!" Harry mouthed to the others and,

petrified, they began to creep down a long gallery full

of suits of armor. They could hear Filch getting

nearer. Neville suddenly let out a frightened squeak

and broke into a run - he tripped, grabbed Ron

around the waist, and the pair of them toppled right

into a suit of armor.

The clanging and crashing were enough to wake the

whole castle.

"RUN!" Harry yelled, and the four of them sprinted

down the gallery, not looking back to see whether

Filch was following - they swung around the

doorpost and galloped down one corridor then

another, Harry in the lead, without any idea where

they were or where they were going - they ripped

through a tapestry and found themselves in a hidden

passageway, hurtled along it and came out near their

Charms classroom, which they knew was miles from

the trophy room.

"I think we've lost him," Harry panted, leaning against

the cold wall and wiping his forehead. Neville was

bent double, wheezing and spluttering.

"I - told - you," Hermione gasped, clutching at the

stitch in her chest, "I - told - you."

"We've got to get back to Gryffindor Tower," said Ron,

"quickly as possible."

"Malfoy tricked you," Hermione said to Harry. "You

realize that, don't you? He was never going to meet

you - Filch knew someone was going to be in the

trophy room, Malfoy must have tipped him off."

Harry thought she was probably right, but he wasn't

going to tell her that.

"Let's go."

It wasn't going to be that simple. They hadn't gone

more than a dozen paces when a doorknob rattled

and something came shooting out of a classroom in

front of them.

It was Peeves. He caught sight of them and gave a

squeal of delight.

"Shut up, Peeves - please - you'll get us thrown

out."

Peeves cackled.

"Wandering around at midnight, Ickle Firsties? Tut,

tut, tut. Naughty, naughty, you'll get caughty."

"Not if you don't give us away, Peeves, please."

"Should tell Filch, I should," said Peeves in a sanity

voice, but his eyes glittered wickedly. "It's for your

own good, you know."

"Get out of the way," snapped Ron, taking a swipe at

Peeves - this was a big mistake.

"STUDENTS OUT OF BED!" Peeves bellowed,

"STUDENTS OUT OF BED DOWN THE CHARMS

CORRIDOR!"

Ducking under Peeves, they ran for their lives, right

to the end of the corridor where they slammed into a

door - and it was locked.

"This is it!" Ron moaned, as they pushed helplessly at

the door, "We're done for! This is the end!"

They could hear footsteps, Filch running as fast as he

could toward Peeves 's shouts.

"Oh, move over," Hermione snarled. She grabbed

Harry's wand, tapped the lock, and whispered,

"Alohomora\"

The lock clicked and the door swung open - they

piled through it, shut it quickly, and pressed their

ears against it, listening.

"Which way did they go, Peeves?" Filch was saying.

"Quick, tell me."

"Say ‘please.' "

"Don't mess with me, Peeves, now where did they go?"

"Shan't say nothing if you don't say please," said

Peeves in his annoying singsong voice.

"All right - please."

"NOTHING! Ha haaa! Told you I wouldn't say nothing

if you didn't say please! Ha ha! Haaaaaa!" And they

heard the sound of Peeves whooshing away and Filch

cursing in rage.

"He thinks this door is locked," Harry whispered. "I

think well be okay - get off Neville!" For Neville had

been tugging on the sleeve of Harry's bathrobe for the

last minute. "What?"

Harry turned around - and saw, quite clearly, what.

For a moment, he was sure he'd walked into a

nightmare - this was too much, on top of everything

that had happened so far.

They weren't in a room, as he had supposed. They

were in a corridor. The forbidden corridor on the third

floor. And now they knew why it was forbidden.

They were looking straight into the eyes of a

monstrous dog, a dog that filled the whole space

between ceiling and floor. It had three heads. Three

pairs of rolling, mad eyes; three noses, twitching and

quivering in their direction; three drooling mouths,

saliva hanging in slippery ropes from yellowish fangs.

It was standing quite still, all six eyes staring at them,

and Harry knew that the only reason they weren't

already dead was that their sudden appearance had

taken it by surprise, but it was quickly getting over

that, there was no mistaking what those thunderous

growls meant.

Harry groped for the doorknob - between Filch and

death, he'd take Filch.

They fell backward - Harry slammed the door shut,

and they ran, they almost flew, back down the

corridor. Filch must have hurried off to look for them

somewhere else, because they didn't see him

anywhere, but they hardly cared - all they wanted to

do was put as much space as possible between them

and that monster. They didn't stop running until they

reached the portrait of the Fat Lady on the seventh

floor.

"Where on earth have you all been?" she asked,

looking at their bathrobes hanging off their shoulders

and their flushed, sweaty faces.

"Never mind that - pig snout, pig snout," panted

Harry, and the portrait swung forward. They

scrambled into the common room and collapsed,

trembling, into armchairs.

It was a while before any of them said anything.

Neville, indeed, looked as if he'd never speak again.

"What do they think they're doing, keeping a thing

like that locked up in a school?" said Ron finally. "If

any dog needs exercise, that one does."

Hermione had got both her breath and her bad

temper back again.

"You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you?" she

snapped. "Didn't you see what it was standing on?"

"The floor?" Harry suggested. "I wasn't looking at its

feet, I was too busy with its heads."

"No, not the floor. It was standing on a trapdoor. It's

obviously guarding something."

She stood up, glaring at them.

"I hope you're pleased with yourselves. We could all

have been killed - or worse, expelled. Now, if you

don't mind, I'm going to bed."

Ron stared after her, his mouth open.

"No, we don't mind," he said. "You'd think we dragged

her along, wouldn't you?"

But Hermione had given Harry something else to

think about as he climbed back into bed. The dog was

guarding something. . . . What had Hagrid said?

Gringotts was the safest place in the world for

something you wanted to hide - except perhaps

Hogwarts.

It looked as though Harry had found out where the

grubby little package from vault seven hundred and

thirteen was.

10

HALLOWEEN

Malfoy couldn't believe his eyes when he saw that

Harry and Ron were still at Hogwarts the next day,

looking tired but perfectly cheerful. Indeed, by the

next morning Harry and Ron thought that meeting

the three-headed dog had been an excellent

adventure, and they were quite keen to have another

one. In the meantime, Harry filled Ron in about the

package that seemed to have been moved from

Gringotts to Hogwarts, and they spent a lot of time

wondering what could possibly need such heavy

protection.

"It's either really valuable or really dangerous," said

Ron.

"Or both," said Harry.

But as all they knew for sure about the mysterious

object was that it was about two inches long, they

didn't have much chance of guessing what it was

without further clues.

Neither Neville nor Hermione showed the slightest

interest in what lay underneath the dog and the

trapdoor. All Neville cared about was never going near

the dog again.

Hermione was now refusing to speak to Harry and

Ron, but she was such a bossy know-it-all that they

saw this as an added bonus. All they really wanted

now was a way of getting back at Malfoy, and to their

great delight, just such a thing arrived in the mail

about a week later.

As the owls flooded into the Great Hall as usual,

everyone's attention was caught at once by a long,

thin package carried by six large screech owls. Harry

was just as interested as everyone else to see what

was in this large parcel, and was amazed when the

owls soared down and dropped it right in front of him,

knocking his bacon to the floor. They had hardly

fluttered out of the way when another owl dropped a

letter on top of the parcel.

Harry ripped open the letter first, which was lucky,

because it said:

DO NOT OPEN THE PARCEL AT THE TABLE.

It contains your new Nimbus Two Thousand, but I

don't want everybody knowing you've got a

broomstick or they'll all want one. Oliver Wood will

meet you tonight on the Quidditch field at seven

o'clock for your first training session.

Professor M. McGonagall

Harry had difficulty hiding his glee as he handed the

note to Ron to read.

"A Nimbus Two Thousand!" Ron moaned enviously.

"I've never even touched one."

They left the hall quickly, wanting to unwrap the

broomstick in private before their first class, but

halfway across the entrance hall they found the way

upstairs barred by Crabbe and Goyle. Malfoy seized

the package from Harry and felt it.

"That's a broomstick," he said, throwing it back to

Harry with a mixture of jealousy and spite on his face.

"You'll be in for it this time, Potter, first years aren't

allowed them."

Ron couldn't resist it.

"It's not any old broomstick," he said, "it's a Nimbus

Two Thousand. What did you say you've got at home,

Malfoy, a Comet Two Sixty?" Ron grinned at Harry.

"Comets look flashy, but they're not in the same

league as the Nimbus."

"What would you know about it, Weasley, you

couldn't afford half the handle," Malfoy snapped back.

"I suppose you and your brothers have to save up

twig by twig."

Before Ron could answer, Professor Flitwick appeared

at Malfoy's elbow.

"Not arguing, I hope, boys?" he squeaked.

"Potters been sent a broomstick, Professor," said

Malfoy quickly.

"Yes, yes, that's right," said Professor Flitwick,

beaming at Harry. "Professor McGonagall told me all

about the special circumstances, Potter. And what

model is it?"

"A Nimbus Two Thousand, sir," said Harry, fighting

not to laugh at the look of horror on Malfoy's face.

"And it's really thanks to Malfoy here that I've got it,"

he added.

Harry and Ron headed upstairs, smothering their

laughter at Malfoy's obvious rage and confusion.

"Well, it's true," Harry chortled as they reached the

top of the marble staircase, "If he hadn't stolen

Neville's Remembrall I wouldn't be on the team. ..."

"So I suppose you think that's a reward for breaking

rules?" came an angry voice from just behind them.

Hermione was stomping up the stairs, looking

disapprovingly at the package in Harry's hand.

"I thought you weren't speaking to us?" said Harry.

"Yes, don't stop now," said Ron, "it's doing us so

much good."

Hermione marched away with her nose in the air.

Harry had a lot of trouble keeping his mind on his

lessons that day. It kept wandering up to the

dormitory where his new broomstick was lying under

his bed, or straying off to the Quidditch field where

he'd be learning to play that night. He bolted his

dinner that evening without noticing what he was

eating, and then rushed upstairs with Ron to unwrap

the Nimbus Two Thousand at last.

"Wow," Ron sighed, as the broomstick rolled onto

Harry's bedspread.

Even Harry, who knew nothing about the different

brooms, thought it looked wonderful. Sleek and

shiny, with a mahogany handle, it had a long tail of

neat, straight twigs and Nimbus Two Thousand

written in gold near the top.

As seven o'clock drew nearer, Harry left the castle and

set off in the dusk toward the Quidditch field. He'd

never been inside the stadium before. Hundreds of

seats were raised in stands around the field so that

the spectators were high enough to see what was

going on. At either end of the field were three golden

poles with hoops on the end. They reminded Harry of

the little plastic sticks Muggle children blew bubbles

through, except that they were fifty feet high.

Too eager to fly again to wait for Wood, Harry

mounted his broomstick and kicked off from the

ground. What a feeling - he swooped in and out of

the goal posts and then sped up and down the field.

The Nimbus Two Thousand turned wherever he

wanted at his lightest touch.

"Hey, Potter, come down!"

Oliver Wood had arrived. He was carrying a large

wooden crate under his arm. Harry landed next to

him.

"Very nice," said Wood, his eyes glinting. "I see what

McGonagall meant ... you really are a natural. I'm

just going to teach you the rules this evening, then

you'll be joining team practice three times a week."

He opened the crate. Inside were four different-sized

balls.

"Right," said Wood. "Now, Quidditch is easy enough to

understand, even if it's not too easy to play. There are

seven players on each side. Three of them are called

Chasers."

"Three Chasers," Harry repeated, as Wood took out a

bright red ball about the size of a soccer ball.

"This ball's called the Quaffle," said Wood. "The

Chasers throw the Quaffle to each other and try and

get it through one of the hoops to score a goal. Ten

points every time the Quaffle goes through one of the

hoops. Follow me?"

"The Chasers throw the Quaffle and put it through

the hoops to score," Harry recited. "So - that's sort of

like basketball on broomsticks with six hoops, isn't

it?"

"What's basketball?" said Wood curiously.

"Never mind," said Harry quickly.

"Now, there's another player on each side who's called

the Keeper - I'm Keeper for Gryffindor. I have to fly

around our hoops and stop the other team from

scoring."

"Three Chasers, one Keeper," said Harry, who was

determined to remember it all. "And they play with

the Quaffle. Okay, got that. So what are they for?" He

pointed at the three balls left inside the box.

"I'll show you now," said Wood. "Take this."

He handed Harry a small club, a bit like a short

baseball bat.

"I'm going to show you what the Bludgers do," Wood

said. "These two are the Bludgers."

He showed Harry two identical balls, jet black and

slightly smaller than the red Quaffle. Harry noticed

that they seemed to be straining to escape the straps

holding them inside the box.

"Stand back," Wood warned Harry. He bent down and

freed one of the Bludgers.

At once, the black ball rose high in the air and then

pelted straight at Harry's face. Harry swung at it with

the bat to stop it from breaking his nose, and sent it

zigzagging away into the air - it zoomed around their

heads and then shot at Wood, who dived on top of it

and managed to pin it to the ground.

"See?" Wood panted, forcing the struggling Bludger

back into the crate and strapping it down safely. "The

Bludgers rocket around, trying to knock players off

their brooms. That's why you have two Beaters on

each team - the Weasley twins are ours - it's their

job to protect their side from the Bludgers and try and

knock them toward the other team. So - think you've

got all that?"

"Three Chasers try and score with the Quaffle; the

Keeper guards the goal posts; the Beaters keep the

Bludgers away from their team," Harry reeled off.

"Very good," said Wood.

"Er - have the Bludgers ever killed anyone?" Harry

asked, hoping he sounded offhand.

"Never at Hogwarts. We've had a couple of broken

jaws but nothing worse than that. Now, the last

member of the team is the Seeker. That's you. And

you don't have to worry about the Quaffle or the

Bludgers - "

" - unless they crack my head open."

"Don't worry, the Weasleys are more than a match for

the Bludgers - I mean, they're like a pair of human

Bludgers themselves."

Wood reached into the crate and took out the fourth

and last ball. Compared with the Quaffle and the

Bludgers, it was tiny, about the size of a large walnut.

It was bright gold and had little fluttering silver

wings.

"This," said Wood, "is the Golden Snitch, and it's the

most important ball of the lot. It's very hard to catch

because it's so fast and difficult to see. It's the

Seeker's job to catch it. You've got to weave in and out

of the Chasers, Beaters, Bludgers, and Quaffle to get

it before the other team's Seeker, because whichever

Seeker catches the Snitch wins his team an extra

hundred and fifty points, so they nearly always win.

That's why Seekers get fouled so much. A game of

Quidditch only ends when the Snitch is caught, so it

can go on for ages - I think the record is three

months, they had to keep bringing on substitutes so

the players could get some sleep.

"Well, that's it - any questions?"

Harry shook his head. He understood what he had to

do all right, it was doing it that was going to be the

problem.

"We won't practice with the Snitch yet," said Wood,

carefully shutting it back inside the crate, "it's too

dark, we might lose it. Let's try you out with a few of

these."

He pulled a bag of ordinary golf balls out of his pocket

and a few minutes later, he and Harry were up in the

air, Wood throwing the golf balls as hard as he could

in every direction for Harry to catch.

Harry didn't miss a single one, and Wood was

delighted. After half an hour, night had really fallen

and they couldn't carry on.

"That Quidditch Cup'll have our name on it this year,"

said Wood happily as they trudged back up to the

castle. "I wouldn't be surprised if you turn out better

than Charlie Weasley, and he could have played for

England if he hadn't gone off chasing dragons."

Perhaps it was because he was now so busy, what

with Quidditch practice three evenings a week on top

of all his homework, but Harry could hardly believe it

when he realized that he'd already been at Hogwarts

two months. The castle felt more like home than

Privet Drive ever had. His lessons, too, were becoming

more and more interesting now that they had

mastered the basics.

On Halloween morning they woke to the delicious

smell of baking pumpkin wafting through the

corridors. Even better, Professor Flitwick announced

in Charms that he thought they were ready to start

making objects fly, something they had all been dying

to try since they'd seen him make Neville's toad zoom

around the classroom. Professor Flitwick put the

class into pairs to practice. Harry's partner was

Seamus Finnigan (which was a relief, because Neville

had been trying to catch his eye). Ron, however, was

to be working with Hermione Granger. It was hard to

tell whether Ron or Hermione was angrier about this.

She hadn't spoken to either of them since the day

Harry's broomstick had arrived.

"Now, don't forget that nice wrist movement we've

been practicing!" squeaked Professor Flitwick,

perched on top of his pile of books as usual. "Swish

and flick, remember, swish and flick. And saying the

magic words properly is very important, too - never

forget Wizard Baruffio, who said ‘s' instead of ‘f and

found himself on the floor with a buffalo on his

chest."

It was very difficult. Harry and Seamus swished and

flicked, but the feather they were supposed to be

sending skyward just lay on the desktop. Seamus got

so impatient that he prodded it with his wand and set

fire to it - Harry had to put it out with his hat.

Ron, at the next table, wasn't having much more

luck.

"Wingardium Leviosal" he shouted, waving his long

arms like a windmill.

"You're saying it wrong," Harry heard Hermione snap.

"It's Wing-gar-dium Levi-o-sa, make the ‘gar' nice and

long."

"You do it, then, if you're so clever," Ron snarled.

Hermione rolled up the sleeves of her gown, flicked

her wand, and said, "Wingardium LeviosaV'

Their feather rose off the desk and hovered about four

feet above their heads.

"Oh, well done!" cried Professor Flitwick, clapping.

"Everyone see here, Miss Granger's done it!"

Ron was in a very bad mood by the end of the class.

"It's no wonder no one can stand her," he said to

Harry as they pushed their way into the crowded

corridor, "she's a nightmare, honestly."

Someone knocked into Harry as they hurried past

him. It was Hermione. Harry caught a glimpse of her

face - and was startled to see that she was in tears.

"I think she heard you."

"So?" said Ron, but he looked a bit uncomfortable.

"She must've noticed she's got no friends."

Hermione didn't turn up for the next class and wasn't

seen all afternoon. On their way down to the Great

Hall for the Halloween feast, Harry and Ron overheard

Parvati Patil telling her friend Lavender that Hermione

was crying in the girls' bathroom and wanted to be

left alone. Ron looked still more awkward at this, but

a moment later they had entered the Great Hall,

where the Halloween decorations put Hermione out of

their minds.

A thousand live bats fluttered from the walls and

ceiling while a thousand more swooped over the

tables in low black clouds, making the candles in the

pumpkins stutter. The feast appeared suddenly on

the golden plates, as it had at the start-of-term

banquet.

Harry was just helping himself to a baked potato

when Professor Quirrell came sprinting into the hall,

his turban askew and terror on his face. Everyone

stared as he reached Professor Dumbledore's chair,

slumped against the table, and gasped, "Troll - in

the dungeons - thought you ought to know."

He then sank to the floor in a dead faint.

There was an uproar. It took several purple

firecrackers exploding from the end of Professor

Dumbledore's wand to bring silence.

"Prefects," he rumbled, "lead your Houses back to the

dormitories immediately!"

Percy was in his element.

"Follow me! Stick together, first years! No need to fear

the troll if you follow my orders! Stay close behind

me, now. Make way, first years coming through!

Excuse me, I'm a prefect!"

"How could a troll get in?" Harry asked as they

climbed the stairs.

"Don't ask me, they're supposed to be really stupid,"

said Ron. "Maybe Peeves let it in for a Halloween

joke."

They passed different groups of people hurrying in

different directions. As they jostled their way through

a crowd of confused Hufflepuffs, Harry suddenly

grabbed Ron's arm.

"I've just thought - Hermione."

"What about her?"

"She doesn't know about the troll."

Ron bit his lip.

"Oh, all right," he snapped. "But Percy'd better not

see us."

Ducking down, they joined the Hufflepuffs going the

other way, slipped down a deserted side corridor, and

hurried off toward the girls' bathroom. They had just

turned the corner when they heard quick footsteps

behind them.

"Percy!" hissed Ron, pulling Harry behind a large

stone griffin.

Peering around it, however, they saw not Percy but

Snape. He crossed the corridor and disappeared from

view.

"What's he doing?" Harry whispered. "Why isn't he

down in the dungeons with the rest of the teachers?"

"Search me."

Quietly as possible, they crept along the next corridor

after Snape 's fading footsteps.

"He's heading for the third floor," Harry said, but Ron

held up his hand.

"Can you smell something?"

Harry sniffed and a foul stench reached his nostrils, a

mixture of old socks and the kind of public toilet no

one seems to clean.

And then they heard it - a low grunting, and the

shuffling footfalls of gigantic feet. Ron pointed - at

the end of a passage to the left, something huge was

moving toward them. They shrank into the shadows

and watched as it emerged into a patch of moonlight.

It was a horrible sight. Twelve feet tall, its skin was a

dull, granite gray, its great lumpy body like a boulder

with its small bald head perched on top like a

coconut. It had short legs thick as tree trunks with

flat, horny feet. The smell coming from it was

incredible. It was holding a huge wooden club, which

dragged along the floor because its arms were so long.

The troll stopped next to a doorway and peered inside.

It waggled its long ears, making up its tiny mind, then

slouched slowly into the room.

"The key's in the lock," Harry muttered. "We could

lock it in."

"Good idea," said Ron nervously.

They edged toward the open door, mouths dry,

praying the troll wasn't about to come out of it. With

one great leap, Harry managed to grab the key, slam

the door, and lock it.

"Yes!"

Flushed with their victory, they started to run back

up the passage, but as they reached the corner they

heard something that made their hearts stop - a

high, petrified scream - and it was coming from the

chamber they'd just chained up.

"Oh, no," said Ron, pale as the Bloody Baron.

"It's the girls' bathroom!" Harry gasped.

" Hermionel" they said together.

It was the last thing they wanted to do, but what

choice did they have? Wheeling around, they sprinted

back to the door and turned the key, fumbling in their

panic. Harry pulled the door open and they ran

inside.

Hermione Granger was shrinking against the wall

opposite, looking as if she was about to faint. The troll

was advancing on her, knocking the sinks off the

walls as it went.

"Confuse it!" Harry said desperately to Ron, and,

seizing a tap, he threw it as hard as he could against

the wall.

The troll stopped a few feet from Hermione. It

lumbered around, blinking stupidly, to see what had

made the noise. Its mean little eyes saw Harry. It

hesitated, then made for him instead, lifting its club

as it went.

"Oy, pea-brain!" yelled Ron from the other side of the

chamber, and he threw a metal pipe at it. The troll

didn't even seem to notice the pipe hitting its

shoulder, but it heard the yell and paused again,

turning its ugly snout toward Ron instead, giving

Harry time to run around it.

"Come on, run, run\" Harry yelled at Hermione, trying

to pull her toward the door, but she couldn't move,

she was still flat against the wall, her mouth open

with terror.

The shouting and the echoes seemed to be driving the

troll berserk. It roared again and started toward Ron,

who was nearest and had no way to escape.

Harry then did something that was both very brave

and very stupid: He took a great running jump and

managed to fasten his arms around the troll's neck

from behind. The troll couldn't feel Harry hanging

there, but even a troll will notice if you stick a long bit

of wood up its nose, and Harry's wand had still been

in his hand when he'd jumped - it had gone straight

up one of the troll's nostrils.

Howling with pain, the troll twisted and flailed its

club, with Harry clinging on for dear life; any second,

the troll was going to rip him off or catch him a

terrible blow with the club.

Hermione had sunk to the floor in fright; Ron pulled

out his own wand - not knowing what he was going

to do he heard himself cry the first spell that came

into his head: "Wingardium Leviosal"

The club flew suddenly out of the troll's hand, rose

high, high up into the air, turned slowly over - and

dropped, with a sickening crack, onto its owner's

head. The troll swayed on the spot and then fell flat

on its face, with a thud that made the whole room

tremble.

Harry got to his feet. He was shaking and out of

breath. Ron was standing there with his wand still

raised, staring at what he had done.

It was Hermione who spoke first.

"Is it - dead?"

"I don't think so," said Harry, "I think it's just been

knocked out."

He bent down and pulled his wand out of the troll's

nose. It was covered in what looked like lumpy gray

glue.

"Urgh - troll boogers."

He wiped it on the troll's trousers.

A sudden slamming and loud footsteps made the

three of them look up. They hadn't realized what a

racket they had been making, but of course, someone

downstairs must have heard the crashes and the

troll's roars. A moment later, Professor McGonagall

had come bursting into the room, closely followed by

Snape, with Quirrell bringing up the rear. Quirrell

took one look at the troll, let out a faint whimper, and

sat quickly down on a toilet, clutching his heart.

Snape bent over the troll. Professor McGonagall was

looking at Ron and Harry. Harry had never seen her

look so angry. Her lips were white. Hopes of winning

fifty points for Gryffindor faded quickly from Harry's

mind.

"What on earth were you thinking of?" said Professor

McGonagall, with cold fury in her voice. Harry looked

at Ron, who was still standing with his wand in the

air. "You're lucky you weren't killed. Why aren't you

in your dormitory?"

Snape gave Harry a swift, piercing look. Harry looked

at the floor. He wished Ron would put his wand down.

Then a small voice came out of the shadows.

"Please, Professor McGonagall - they were looking for

me."

"Miss Granger!"

Hermione had managed to get to her feet at last.

"I went looking for the troll because I - I thought I

could deal with it on my own - you know, because

I've read all about them."

Ron dropped his wand. Hermione Granger, telling a

downright lie to a teacher?

"If they hadn't found me, I'd be dead now. Harry

stuck his wand up its nose and Ron knocked it out

with its own club. They didn't have time to come and

fetch anyone. It was about to finish me off when they

arrived."

Harry and Ron tried to look as though this story

wasn't new to them.

"Well - in that case ..." said Professor McGonagall,

staring at the three of them, "Miss Granger, you

foolish girl, how could you think of tackling a

mountain troll on your own?"

Hermione hung her head. Harry was speechless.

Hermione was the last person to do anything against

the rules, and here she was, pretending she had, to

get them out of trouble. It was as if Snape had started

handing out sweets.

"Miss Granger, five points will be taken from

Gryffindor for this," said Professor McGonagall. "I'm

very disappointed in you. If you're not hurt at all,

you'd better get off to Gryffindor Tower. Students are

finishing the feast in their Houses."

Hermione left.

Professor McGonagall turned to Harry and Ron.

"Well, I still say you were lucky, but not many first

years could have taken on a full-grown mountain

troll. You each win Gryffindor five points. Professor

Dumbledore will be informed of this. You may go."

They hurried out of the chamber and didn't speak at

all until they had climbed two floors up. It was a relief

to be away from the smell of the troll, quite apart from

anything else.

"We should have gotten more than ten points," Ron

grumbled.

"Five, you mean, once she's taken off Hermione 's."

"Good of her to get us out of trouble like that," Ron

admitted. "Mind you, we did save her."

"She might not have needed saving if we hadn't

locked the thing in with her," Harry reminded him.

They had reached the portrait of the Fat Lady.

"Pig snout," they said and entered.

The common room was packed and noisy. Everyone

was eating the food that had been sent up. Hermione,

however, stood alone by the door, waiting for them.

There was a very embarrassed pause. Then, none of

them looking at each other, they all said "Thanks,"

and hurried off to get plates.

But from that moment on, Hermione Granger became

their friend. There are some things you can't share

without ending up liking each other, and knocking

out a twelve-foot mountain troll is one of them.

QUIDDITCH

As they entered November, the weather turned very

cold. The mountains around the school became icy

gray and the lake like chilled steel. Every morning the

ground was covered in frost. Hagrid could be seen

from the upstairs windows defrosting broomsticks on

the Quidditch field, bundled up in a long moleskin

overcoat, rabbit fur gloves, and enormous beaverskin

boots.

The Quidditch season had begun. On Saturday, Harry

would be playing in his first match after weeks of

training: Gryffindor versus Slytherin. If Gryffindor

won, they would move up into second place in the

House Championship.

Hardly anyone had seen Harry play because Wood

had decided that, as their secret weapon, Harry

should be kept, well, secret. But the news that he was

playing Seeker had leaked out somehow, and Harry

didn't know which was worse - people telling him

he'd be brilliant or people telling him they'd be

running around underneath him holding a mattress.

It was really lucky that Harry now had Hermione as a

friend. He didn't know how he'd have gotten through

all his homework without her, what with all the last-

minute Quidditch practice Wood was making them

do. She had also lent him Quidditch Through the Ages,

which turned out to be a very interesting read.

Harry learned that there were seven hundred ways of

committing a Quidditch foul and that all of them had

happened during a World Cup match in 1473; that

Seekers were usually the smallest and fastest players,

and that most serious Quidditch accidents seemed to

happen to them; that although people rarely died

playing Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish

and turn up months later in the Sahara Desert.

Hermione had become a bit more relaxed about

breaking rules since Harry and Ron had saved her

from the mountain troll, and she was much nicer for

it. The day before Harry's first Quidditch match the

three of them were out in the freezing courtyard

during break, and she had conjured them up a bright

blue fire that could be carried around in a jam jar.

They were standing with their backs to it, getting

warm, when Snape crossed the yard. Harry noticed at

once that Snape was limping. Harry, Ron, and

Hermione moved closer together to block the fire from

view; they were sure it wouldn't be allowed.

Unfortunately, something about their guilty faces

caught Snape's eye. He limped over. He hadn't seen

the fire, but he seemed to be looking for a reason to

tell them off anyway.

"What's that you've got there, Potter?"

It was Quidditch Through the Ages. Harry showed him.

"Library books are not to be taken outside the

school," said Snape. "Give it to me. Five points from

Gryffindor."

"He's just made that rule up," Harry muttered angrily

as Snape limped away. "Wonder what's wrong with

his leg?"

"Dunno, but I hope it's really hurting him," said Ron

bitterly.

The Gryffindor common room was very noisy that

evening. Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat together next

to a window. Hermione was checking Harry and Ron's

Charms homework for them. She would never let

them copy ("How will you learn?"), but by asking her

to read it through, they got the right answers anyway.

Harry felt restless. He wanted Quidditch Through the

Ages back, to take his mind off his nerves about

tomorrow. Why should he be afraid of Snape? Getting

up, he told Ron and Hermione he was going to ask

Snape if he could have it.

"Better you than me," they said together, but Harry

had an idea that Snape wouldn't refuse if there were

other teachers listening.

He made his way down to the staffroom and knocked.

There was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing.

Perhaps Snape had left the book in there? It was

worth a try. He pushed the door ajar and peered

inside - and a horrible scene met his eyes.

Snape and Filch were inside, alone. Snape was

holding his robes above his knees. One of his legs was

bloody and mangled. Filch was handing Snape

bandages.

"Blasted thing," Snape was saying. "How are you

supposed to keep your eyes on all three heads at

once?"

Harry tried to shut the door quietly, but -

"POTTER!"

Snape 's face was twisted with fury as he dropped his

robes quickly to hide his leg. Harry gulped.

"I just wondered if I could have my book back."

"GET OUT! OUT!"

Harry left, before Snape could take any more points

from Gryffindor. He sprinted back upstairs.

"Did you get it?" Ron asked as Harry joined them.

"What's the matter?"

In a low whisper, Harry told them what he'd seen.

"You know what this means?" he finished

breathlessly. "He tried to get past that three-headed

dog at Halloween! That's where he was going when we

saw him - he's after whatever it's guarding! And I'd

bet my broomstick he let that troll in, to make a

diversion!"

Hermione's eyes were wide.

"No - he wouldn't," she said. "I know he's not very

nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something

Dumbledore was keeping safe."

"Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints

or something," snapped Ron. "I'm with Harry. I

wouldn't put anything past Snape. But what's he

after? What's that dog guarding?"

Harry went to bed with his head buzzing with the

same question. Neville was snoring loudly, but Harry

couldn't sleep. He tried to empty his mind - he

needed to sleep, he had to, he had his first Quidditch

match in a few hours - but the expression on

Snape's face when Harry had seen his leg wasn't easy

to forget.

The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The

Great Hall was full of the delicious smell of fried

sausages and the cheerful chatter of everyone looking

forward to a good Quidditch match.

"You've got to eat some breakfast."

"I don't want anything."

"Just a bit of toast," wheedled Hermione.

"I'm not hungry."

Harry felt terrible. In an hour's time he'd be walking

onto the field.

"Harry, you need your strength," said Seamus

Finnigan. "Seekers are always the ones who get

clobbered by the other team."

"Thanks, Seamus," said Harry, watching Seamus pile

ketchup on his sausages.

By eleven o'clock the whole school seemed to be out

in the stands around the Quidditch pitch. Many

students had binoculars. The seats might be raised

high in the air, but it was still difficult to see what

was going on sometimes.

Ron and Hermione joined Neville, Seamus, and Dean

the West Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for

Harry, they had painted a large banner on one of the

sheets Scabbers had ruined. It said Potter for

President, and Dean, who was good at drawing, had

done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Then

Hermione had performed a tricky little charm so that

the paint flashed different colors.

Meanwhile, in the locker room, Harry and the rest of

the team were changing into their scarlet Quidditch

robes (Slytherin would be playing in green) .

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

"Okay, men," he said.

"And women," said Chaser Angelina Johnson.

"And women," Wood agreed. "This is it."

"The big one," said Fred Weasley.

"The one we've all been waiting for," said George.

"We know Oliver's speech by heart," Fred told Harry,

"we were on the team last year."

"Shut up, you two," said Wood. "This is the best team

Gryffindor's had in years. We're going to win. I know

it."

He glared at them all as if to say, "Or else."

"Right. It's time. Good luck, all of you."

Harry followed Fred and George out of the locker

room and, hoping his knees weren't going to give way,

walked onto the field to loud cheers.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the

middle of the field waiting for the two teams, her

broom in her hand.

"Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you," she said,

once they were all gathered around her. Harry noticed

that she seemed to be speaking particularly to the

Slytherin Captain, Marcus Flint, a fifth year. Harry

thought Flint looked as if he had some troll blood in

him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the fluttering

banner high above, flashing Potter for President over

the crowd. His heart skipped. He felt braver.

"Mount your brooms, please."

Harry clambered onto his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They

were off.

"And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina

Johnson of Gryffindor - what an excellent Chaser

that girl is, and rather attractive, too - "

"JORDAN!"

"Sorry, Professor."

The Weasley twins' friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the

commentary for the match, closely watched by

Professor McGonagall.

"And she's really belting along up there, a neat pass

to Alicia Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood's, last

year only a reserve - back to Johnson and - no, the

Slytherins have taken the Quaffle, Slytherin Captain

Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes - Flint

flying like an eagle up there - he's going to sc- no,

stopped by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper

Wood and the Gryffindors take the Quaffle - that's

Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice dive

around Flint, off up the field and - OUCH - that

must have hurt, hit in the back of the head by a

Bludger - Quaffle taken by the Slytherins - that's

Adrian Pucey speeding off toward the goal posts, but

he's blocked by a second Bludger - sent his way by

Fred or George Weasley, can't tell which - nice play

by the Gryffindor Beater, anyway, and Johnson back

in possession of the Quaffle, a clear field ahead and

off she goes - she's really flying - dodges a speeding

Bludger - the goal posts are ahead - come on, now,

Angelina - Keeper Bletchley dives - misses -

GRYFFINDORS SCORE!"

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and

moans from the Slytherins.

"Budge up there, move along."

"Hagrid!"

Ron and Hermione squeezed together to give Hagrid

enough space to join them.

"Bin watchin' from me hut," said Hagrid, patting a

large pair of binoculars around his neck, "But it isn't

the same as bein' in the crowd. No sign of the Snitch

yet, eh?"

"Nope," said Ron. "Harry hasn't had much to do yet."

"Kept outta trouble, though, that's somethin'," said

Hagrid, raising his binoculars and peering skyward at

the speck that was Harry.

Way up above them, Harry was gliding over the game,

squinting about for some sign of the Snitch. This was

part of his and Wood's game plan.

"Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the

Snitch," Wood had said. "We don't want you attacked

before you have to be."

When Angelina had scored, Harry had done a couple

of loop-the-loops to let off his feelings. Now he was

back to staring around for the Snitch. Once he caught

sight of a flash of gold, but it was just a reflection

from one of the Weasleys' wristwatches, and once a

Bludger decided to come pelting his way, more like a

cannonball than anything, but Harry dodged it and

Fred Weasley came chasing after it.

"All right there, Harry?" he had time to yell, as he

beat the Bludger furiously toward Marcus Flint.

"Slytherin in possession," Lee Jordan was saying,

"Chaser Pucey ducks two Bludgers, two Weasleys,

and Chaser Bell, and speeds toward the - wait a

moment - was that the Snitch?"

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey

dropped the Quaffle, too busy looking over his

shoulder at the flash of gold that had passed his left

ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived

downward after the streak of gold. Slytherin Seeker

Terence Higgs had seen it, too. Neck and neck they

hurtled toward the Snitch - all the Chasers seemed

to have forgotten what they were supposed to be

doing as they hung in midair to watch.

Harry was faster than Higgs - he could see the little

round ball, wings fluttering, darting up ahead - he

put on an extra spurt of speed -

WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors

below - Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose,

and Harry's broom spun off course, Harry holding on

for dear life.

"Foul!" screamed the Gryffindors.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint and then ordered

a free shot at the goal posts for Gryffindor. But in all

the confusion, of course, the Golden Snitch had

disappeared from sight again.

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, "Send

him off, ref! Red card!"

"What are you talking about, Dean?" said Ron.

"Red card!" said Dean furiously. "In soccer you get

shown the red card and you're out of the game!"

"But this isn't soccer, Dean," Ron reminded him.

Hagrid, however, was on Dean's side.

"They oughta change the rules. Flint coulda knocked

Harry outta the air."

Lee Jordan was finding it difficult not to take sides.

"So - after that obvious and disgusting bit of

cheating - "

"Jordan!" growled Professor McGonagall.

"I mean, after that open and revolting foul - "

"Jordan, I'm warning you - "

"All right, all right. Flint nearly kills the Gryffindor

Seeker, which could happen to anyone, I'm sure, so a

penalty to Gryffindor, taken by Spinnet, who puts it

away, no trouble, and we continue play, Gryffindor

still in possession."

It was as Harry dodged another Bludger, which went

spinning dangerously past his head, that it happened.

His broom gave a sudden, frightening lurch. For a

split second, he thought he was going to fall. He

gripped the broom tightly with both his hands and

knees. He'd never felt anything like that.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was

trying to buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands

did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. Harry

tried to turn back toward the Gryffindor goal posts -

he had half a mind to ask Wood to call time-out -

and then he realized that his broom was completely

out of his control. He couldn't turn it. He couldn't

direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air, and

every now and then making violent swishing

movements that almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating.

"Slytherin in possession - Flint with the Quaffle -

passes Spinnet - passes Bell - hit hard in the face

by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose - only joking,

Professor - Slytherins score - oh no ..."

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have

noticed that Harry's broom was behaving strangely It

was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game,

jerking and twitching as it went.

"Dunno what Harry thinks he's doing," Hagrid

mumbled. He stared through his binoculars. "If I

didn' know better, I'd say he'd lost control of his

broom ... but he can't have. ..."

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over

the stands. His broom had started to roll over and

over, with him only just managing to hold on. Then

the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a

wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling

from it, holding on with only one hand.

"Did something happen to it when Flint blocked him?"

Seamus whispered.

"Can't have," Hagrid said, his voice shaking. "Can't

nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful

Dark magic - no kid could do that to a Nimbus Two

Thousand."

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid 's binoculars,

but instead of looking up at Harry, she started

looking frantically at the crowd.

"What are you doing?" moaned Ron, gray-faced.

"I knew it," Hermione gasped, "Snape - look."

Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the middle

of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on

Harry and was muttering nonstop under his breath.

"He's doing something - jinxing the broom," said

Hermione.

"What should we do?"

"Leave it to me."

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had

disappeared. Ron turned the binoculars back on

Harry. His broom was vibrating so hard, it was almost

impossible for him to hang on much longer. The

whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as the

Weasleys flew up to try and pull Harry safely onto one

of their brooms, but it was no good - every time they

got near him, the broom would jump higher still. They

dropped lower and circled beneath him, obviously

hoping to catch him if he fell. Marcus Flint seized the

Quaffle and scored five times without anyone

noticing.

"Come on, Hermione," Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand

where Snape stood, and was now racing along the row

behind him; she didn't even stop to say sorry as she

knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the row in

front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled

out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen

words. Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto

the hem of Snape 's robes.

It took perhaps thirty seconds for Snape to realize

that he was on fire. A sudden yelp told her she had

done her job. Scooping the fire off him into a little jar

in her pocket, she scrambled back along the row -

Snape would never know what had happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able

to clamber back on to his broom.

"Neville, you can look!" Ron said. Neville had been

sobbing into Hagrid's jacket for the last five minutes.

Harry was speeding toward the ground when the

crowd saw him clap his hand to his mouth as though

he was about to be sick - he hit the field on all fours

- coughed - and something gold fell into his hand.

"I've got the Snitch!" he shouted, waving it above his

head, and the game ended in complete confusion.

"He didn't catch it, he nearly swallowed it," Flint was

still howling twenty minutes later, but it made no

difference - Harry hadn't broken any rules and Lee

Jordan was still happily shouting the results -

Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy

points to sixty. Harry heard none of this, though. He

was being made a cup of strong tea back in Hagrid's

hut, with Ron and Hermione.

"It was Snape," Ron was explaining, "Hermione and I

saw him. He was cursing your broomstick, muttering,

he wouldn't take his eyes off you."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid, who hadn't heard a word of

what had gone on next to him in the stands. "Why

would Snape do somethin' like that?"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at one another,

wondering what to tell him. Harry decided on the

truth.

"I found out something about him," he told Hagrid.

"He tried to get past that three-headed dog on

Halloween. It bit him. We think he was trying to steal

whatever it's guarding."

Hagrid dropped the teapot.

"How do you know about Fluffy?" he said.

" Fluffy ?"

"Yeah - he's mine - bought him off a Greek chappie

I met in the pub las' year - I lent him to Dumbledore

to guard the - "

"Yes?" said Harry eagerly.

"Now, don't ask me anymore," said Hagrid gruffly.

"That's top secret, that is."

"But Snape's trying to steal it."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid again. "Snape's a Hogwarts

teacher, he'd do nothin' of the sort."

"So why did he just try and kill Harry?" cried

Hermione.

The afternoon's events certainly seemed to have

changed her mind about Snape.

"I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I've read all

about them! You've got to keep eye contact, and

Snape wasn't blinking at all, I saw him!"

"I'm tellin' yeh, yer wrong!" said Hagrid hotly. "I don'

know why Harry's broom acted like that, but Snape

wouldn' try an' kill a student! Now, listen to me, all

three of yeh - yer meddlin' in things that don'

concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an'

you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor

Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel - ■"

"Aha!" said Harry, "so there's someone called Nicolas

Flamel involved, is there?"

Hagrid looked furious with himself.

THE MIRROR OF ERISED

Christmas was coming. One morning in mid-

December, Hogwarts woke to find itself covered in

several feet of snow. The lake froze solid and the

Weasley twins were punished for bewitching several

snowballs so that they followed Quirrell around,

bouncing off the back of his turban. The few owls that

managed to battle their way through the stormy sky

to deliver mail had to be nursed back to health by

Hagrid before they could fly off again.

No one could wait for the holidays to start. While the

Gryffindor common room and the Great Hall had

roaring fires, the drafty corridors had become icy and

a bitter wind rattled the windows in the classrooms.

Worst of all were Professor Snape's classes down in

the dungeons, where their breath rose in a mist

before them and they kept as close as possible to

their hot cauldrons.

"I do feel so sorry," said Draco Malfoy, one Potions

class, "for all those people who have to stay at

Hogwarts for Christmas because they're not wanted

at home."

He was looking over at Harry as he spoke. Crabbe and

Goyle chuckled. Harry, who was measuring out

powdered spine of lion-fish, ignored them. Malfoy had

been even more unpleasant than usual since the

Quidditch match. Disgusted that the Slytherins had

lost, he had tried to get everyone laughing at how a

wide-mouthed tree frog would be replacing Harry as

Seeker next. Then he'd realized that nobody found

this funny, because they were all so impressed at the

way Harry had managed to stay on his bucking

broomstick. So Malfoy, jealous and angry, had gone

back to taunting Harry about having no proper

family.

It was true that Harry wasn't going back to Privet

Drive for Christmas. Professor McGonagall had come

around the week before, making a list of students

who would be staying for the holidays, and Harry had

signed up at once. He didn't feel sorry for himself at

all; this would probably be the best Christmas he'd

ever had. Ron and his brothers were staying, too,

because Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were going to Romania

to visit Charlie.

When they left the dungeons at the end of Potions,

they found a large fir tree blocking the corridor ahead.

Two enormous feet sticking out at the bottom and a

loud puffing sound told them that Hagrid was behind

it.

"Hi, Hagrid, want any help?" Ron asked, sticking his

head through the branches.

"Nah, I'm all right, thanks, Ron."

"Would you mind moving out of the way?" came

Malfoy's cold drawl from behind them. "Are you trying

to earn some extra money, Weasley? Hoping to be

gamekeeper yourself when you leave Hogwarts, I

suppose - that hut of Hagrid's must seem like a

palace compared to what your family's used to."

Ron dived at Malfoy just as Snape came up the stairs.

"WEASLEY!"

Ron let go of the front of Malfoy's robes.

"He was provoked, Professor Snape," said Hagrid,

sticking his huge hairy face out from behind the tree.

"Malfoy was insultin' his family."

"Be that as it may, fighting is against Hogwarts rules,

Hagrid," said Snape silkily. "Five points from

Gryffindor, Weasley, and be grateful it isn't more.

Move along, all of you."

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle pushed roughly past the

tree, scattering needles everywhere and smirking.

"I'll get him," said Ron, grinding his teeth at Malfoy's

back, "one of these days, I'll get him - "

"I hate them both," said Harry, "Malfoy and Snape."

"Come on, cheer up, it's nearly Christmas," said

Hagrid. "Tell yeh what, come with me an' see the

Great Hall, looks a treat."

So the three of them followed Hagrid and his tree off

to the Great Hall, where Professor McGonagall and

Professor Flitwick were busy with the Christmas

decorations.

"Ah, Hagrid, the last tree - put it in the far corner,

would you?"

The hall looked spectacular. Festoons of holly and

mistletoe hung all around the walls, and no less than

twelve towering Christmas trees stood around the

room, some sparkling with tiny icicles, some glittering

with hundreds of candles.

"How many days you got left until yer holidays?"

Hagrid asked.

"Just one," said Hermione. "And that reminds me -

Harry, Ron, we've got half an hour before lunch, we

should be in the library."

"Oh yeah, you're right," said Ron, tearing his eyes

away from Professor Flitwick, who had golden

bubbles blossoming out of his wand and was trailing

them over the branches of the new tree.

"The library?" said Hagrid, following them out of the

hall. "Just before the holidays? Bit keen, aren't yeh?"

"Oh, we're not working," Harry told him brightly.

"Ever since you mentioned Nicolas Flamel we've been

trying to find out who he is."

"You what?" Hagrid looked shocked. "Listen here -

I've told yeh - drop it. It's nothin' to you what that

dog's guardin'."

"We just want to know who Nicolas Flamel is, that's

all," said Hermione.

"Unless you'd like to tell us and save us the trouble?"

Harry added. "We must've been through hundreds of

books already and we can't find him anywhere - just

give us a hint - I know I've read his name

somewhere."

"I'm sayin' nothin'," said Hagrid flatly.

"Just have to find out for ourselves, then," said Ron,

and they left Hagrid looking disgruntled and hurried

off to the library.

They had indeed been searching books for Flamel's

name ever since Hagrid had let it slip, because how

else were they going to find out what Snape was

trying to steal? The trouble was, it was very hard to

know where to begin, not knowing what Flamel might

have done to get himself into a book. He wasn't in

Great Wizards of the Twentieth Century, or Notable

Magical Names of Our Time ; he was missing, too, from

Important Modern Magical Discoveries, and A Study of

Recent Developments in Wizardry. And then, of

course, there was the sheer size of the library; tens of

thousands of books; thousands of shelves; hundreds

of narrow rows.

Hermione took out a list of subjects and titles she had

decided to search while Ron strode off down a row of

books and started pulling them off the shelves at

random. Harry wandered over to the Restricted

Section. He had been wondering for a while if Flamel

wasn't somewhere in there. Unfortunately, you

needed a specially signed note from one of the

teachers to look in any of the restricted books, and he

knew he'd never get one. These were the books

containing powerful Dark Magic never taught at

Hogwarts, and only read by older students studying

advanced Defense Against the Dark Arts.

"What are you looking for, boy?"

"Nothing," said Harry.

Madam Pince the librarian brandished a feather

duster at him.

"You'd better get out, then. Go on - out!"

Wishing he'd been a bit quicker at thinking up some

story, Harry left the library. He, Ron, and Hermione

had already agreed they'd better not ask Madam

Pince where they could find Flamel. They were sure

she'd be able to tell them, but they couldn't risk

Snape hearing what they were up to.

Harry waited outside in the corridor to see if the other

two had found anything, but he wasn't very hopeful.

They had been looking for two weeks, after all, but as

they only had odd moments between lessons it wasn't

surprising they'd found nothing. What they really

needed was a nice long search without Madam Pince

breathing down their necks.

Five minutes later, Ron and Hermione joined him,

shaking their heads. They went off to lunch.

"You will keep looking while I'm away, won't you?"

said Hermione. "And send me an owl if you find

anything."

"And you could ask your parents if they know who

Flamel is," said Ron. "It'd be safe to ask them."

"Very safe, as they're both dentists," said Hermione.

Once the holidays had started, Ron and Harry were

having too good a time to think much about Flamel.

They had the dormitory to themselves and the

common room was far emptier than usual, so they

were able to get the good armchairs by the fire. They

sat by the hour eating anything they could spear on a

toasting fork - bread, English muffins,

marshmallows - and plotting ways of getting Malfoy

expelled, which were fun to talk about even if they

wouldn't work.

Ron also started teaching Harry wizard chess. This

was exactly like Muggle chess except that the figures

were alive, which made it a lot like directing troops in

battle. Ron's set was very old and battered. Like

everything else he owned, it had once belonged to

someone else in his family - in this case, his

grandfather. However, old chessmen weren't a

drawback at all. Ron knew them so well he never had

trouble getting them to do what he wanted.

Harry played with chessmen Seamus Finnigan had

lent him, and they didn't trust him at all. He wasn't a

very good player yet and they kept shouting different

bits of advice at him, which was confusing. "Don't

send me there, can't you see his knight? Send him, we

can afford to lose him."

On Christmas Eve, Harry went to bed looking forward

to the next day for the food and the fun, but not

expecting any presents at all. When he woke early in

the morning, however, the first thing he saw was a

small pile of packages at the foot of his bed.

"Merry Christmas," said Ron sleepily as Harry

scrambled out of bed and pulled on his bathrobe.

"You, too," said Harry. "Will you look at this? I've got

some presents!"

"What did you expect, turnips?" said Ron, turning to

his own pile, which was a lot bigger than Harry's.

Harry picked up the top parcel. It was wrapped in

thick brown paper and scrawled across it was To

Harry, from Hagrid. Inside was a roughly cut wooden

flute. Hagrid had obviously whittled it himself. Harry

blew it - it sounded a bit like an owl.

A second, very small parcel contained a note.

We received your message and enclose your Christmas

present. From Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia. Taped

to the note was a fifty-pence piece.

"That's friendly," said Harry.

Ron was fascinated by the fifty pence.

" Weird\ " he said, "What a shape! This is money?"

"You can keep it," said Harry, laughing at how

pleased Ron was. "Hagrid and my aunt and uncle -

so who sent these?"

"I think I know who that one's from," said Ron,

turning a bit pink and pointing to a very lumpy

parcel. "My mom. I told her you didn't expect any

presents and - oh, no," he groaned, "she's made you

a Weasley sweater."

Harry had torn open the parcel to find a thick, hand-

knitted sweater in emerald green and a large box of

homemade fudge.

"Every year she makes us a sweater," said Ron,

unwrapping his own, "and mine's always maroon."

"That's really nice of her," said Harry, trying the

fudge, which was very tasty.

His next present also contained candy - a large box

of Chocolate Frogs from Hermione.

This only left one parcel. Harry picked it up and felt

it. It was very light. He unwrapped it.

Something fluid and silvery gray went slithering to the

floor where it lay in gleaming folds. Ron gasped.

"I've heard of those," he said in a hushed voice,

dropping the box of Every Flavor Beans he'd gotten

from Hermione. "If that's what I think it is - they're

really rare, and really valuable."

"What is it?"

Harry picked the shining, silvery cloth off the floor. It

was strange to the touch, like water woven into

material.

"It's an Invisibility Cloak," said Ron, a look of awe on

his face. "I'm sure it is - try it on."

Harry threw the cloak around his shoulders and Ron

gave a yell.

"It is! Look down!"

Harry looked down at his feet, but they were gone. He

dashed to the mirror. Sure enough, his reflection

looked back at him, just his head suspended in

midair, his body completely invisible. He pulled the

cloak over his head and his reflection vanished

completely.

"There's a note!" said Ron suddenly. "A note fell out of

it!"

Harry pulled off the cloak and seized the letter.

Written in narrow, loopy writing he had never seen

before were the following words:

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It

is time it was returned to you.

Use it well.

A Very Merry Christmas to you.

There was no signature. Harry stared at the note. Ron

was admiring the cloak.

"I'd give anuthinq for one of these," he said. "Anuthinq.

What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Harry. He felt very strange. Who had

sent the cloak? Had it really once belonged to his

father?

Before he could say or think anything else, the

dormitory door was flung open and Fred and George

Weasley bounded in. Harry stuffed the cloak quickly

out of sight. He didn't feel like sharing it with anyone

else yet.

"Merry Christmas!"

"Hey, look - Harry's got a Weasley sweater, too!"

Fred and George were wearing blue sweaters, one

with a large yellow F on it, the other a G.

"Harry's is better than ours, though," said Fred,

holding up Harry's sweater. "She obviously makes

more of an effort if you're not family."

"Why aren't you wearing yours, Ron?" George

demanded. "Come on, get it on, they're lovely and

warm."

"I hate maroon," Ron moaned halfheartedly as he

pulled it over his head.

"You haven't got a letter on yours," George observed.

"I suppose she thinks you don't forget your name. But

we're not stupid - we know we're called Gred and

Forge."

"What's all this noise?"

Percy Weasley stuck his head through the door,

looking disapproving. He had clearly gotten halfway

through unwrapping his presents as he, too, carried a

lumpy sweater over his arm, which Fred seized.

"P for prefect! Get it on, Percy, come on, we're all

wearing ours, even Harry got one."

"I - don't - want - " said Percy thickly, as the twins

forced the sweater over his head, knocking his glasses

askew.

"And you're not sitting with the prefects today,

either," said George. "Christmas is a time for family."

They frog-marched Percy from the room, his arms

pinned to his side by his sweater.

Harry had never in all his life had such a Christmas

dinner. A hundred fat, roast turkeys; mountains of

roast and boiled potatoes; platters of chipolatas;

tureens of buttered peas, silver boats of thick, rich

gravy and cranberry sauce - and stacks of wizard

crackers every few feet along the table. These

fantastic party favors were nothing like the feeble

Muggle ones the Dursleys usually bought, with their

little plastic toys and their flimsy paper hats inside.

Harry pulled a wizard cracker with Fred and it didn't

just bang, it went off with a blast like a cannon and

engulfed them all in a cloud of blue smoke, while from

the inside exploded a rear admiral's hat and several

live, white mice. Up at the High Table, Dumbledore

had swapped his pointed wizard's hat for a flowered

bonnet, and was chuckling merrily at a joke Professor

Flitwick had just read him.

Flaming Christmas puddings followed the turkey.

Percy nearly broke his teeth on a silver Sickle

embedded in his slice. Harry watched Hagrid getting

redder and redder in the face as he called for more

wine, finally kissing Professor McGonagall on the

cheek, who, to Harry's amazement, giggled and

blushed, her top hat lopsided.

When Harry finally left the table, he was laden down

with a stack of things out of the crackers, including a

pack of non-explodable, luminous balloons, a Grow-

Your-Own-Warts kit, and his own new wizard chess

set. The white mice had disappeared and Harry had a

nasty feeling they were going to end up as Mrs.

Norris's Christmas dinner.

Harry and the Weasleys spent a happy afternoon

having a furious snowball fight on the grounds. Then,

cold, wet, and gasping for breath, they returned to the

fire in the Gryffindor common room, where Harry

broke in his new chess set by losing spectacularly to

Ron. He suspected he wouldn't have lost so badly if

Percy hadn't tried to help him so much.

After a meal of turkey sandwiches, crumpets, trifle,

and Christmas cake, everyone felt too full and sleepy

to do much before bed except sit and watch Percy

chase Fred and George all over Gryffindor Tower

because they'd stolen his prefect badge.

It had been Harry's best Christmas day ever. Yet

something had been nagging at the back of his mind

all day. Not until he climbed into bed was he free to

think about it: the Invisibility Cloak and whoever had

sent it.

Ron, full of turkey and cake and with nothing

mysterious to bother him, fell asleep almost as soon

as he'd drawn the curtains of his four-poster. Harry

leaned over the side of his own bed and pulled the

cloak out from under it.

His father's ... this had been his father's. He let the

material flow over his hands, smoother than silk, light

as air. Use it well, the note had said.

He had to try it, now. He slipped out of bed and

wrapped the cloak around himself. Looking down at

his legs, he saw only moonlight and shadows. It was a

very funny feeling.

Use it well.

Suddenly, Harry felt wide-awake. The whole of

Hogwarts was open to him in this cloak. Excitement

flooded through him as he stood there in the dark

and silence. He could go anywhere in this, anywhere,

and Filch would never know.

Ron grunted in his sleep. Should Harry wake him?

Something held him back - his father's cloak - he

felt that this time - the first time - he wanted to use

it alone.

He crept out of the dormitory, down the stairs, across

the common room, and climbed through the portrait

hole.

"Who's there?" squawked the Fat Lady. Harry said

nothing. He walked quickly down the corridor.

Where should he go? He stopped, his heart racing,

and thought. And then it came to him. The Restricted

Section in the library. He'd be able to read as long as

he liked, as long as it took to find out who Flamel

was. He set off, drawing the Invisibility Cloak tight

around him as he walked.

The library was pitch-black and very eerie. Harry lit a

lamp to see his way along the rows of books. The

lamp looked as if it was floating along in midair, and

even though Harry could feel his arm supporting it,

the sight gave him the creeps.

The Restricted Section was right at the back of the

library. Stepping carefully over the rope that

separated these books from the rest of the library, he

held up his lamp to read the titles.

They didn't tell him much. Their peeling, faded gold

letters spelled words in languages Harry couldn't

understand. Some had no title at all. One book had a

dark stain on it that looked horribly like blood. The

hairs on the back of Harry's neck prickled. Maybe he

was imagining it, maybe not, but he thought a faint

whispering was coming from the books, as though

they knew someone was there who shouldn't be.

He had to start somewhere. Setting the lamp down

carefully on the floor, he looked along the bottom

shelf for an interesting-looking book. A large black

and silver volume caught his eye. He pulled it out

with difficulty, because it was very heavy, and,

balancing it on his knee, let it fall open.

A piercing, bloodcurdling shriek split the silence -

the book was screaming! Harry snapped it shut, but

the shriek went on and on, one high, unbroken,

earsplitting note. He stumbled backward and knocked

over his lamp, which went out at once. Panicking, he

heard footsteps coming down the corridor outside -

stuffing the shrieking book back on the shelf, he ran

for it. He passed Filch in the doorway; Filch's pale,

wild eyes looked straight through him, and Harry

slipped under Filch's outstretched arm and streaked

off up the corridor, the book's shrieks still ringing in

his ears.

He came to a sudden halt in front of a tall suit of

armor. He had been so busy getting away from the

library, he hadn't paid attention to where he was

going. Perhaps because it was dark, he didn't

recognize where he was at all. There was a suit of

armor near the kitchens, he knew, but he must be

five floors above there.

"You asked me to come directly to you, Professor, if

anyone was wandering around at night, and

somebody's been in the library - Restricted Section."

Harry felt the blood drain out of his face. Wherever he

was, Filch must know a shortcut, because his soft,

greasy voice was getting nearer, and to his horror, it

was Snape who replied, "The Restricted Section? Well,

they can't be far, we'll catch them."

Harry stood rooted to the spot as Filch and Snape

came around the corner ahead. They couldn't see

him, of course, but it was a narrow corridor and if

they came much nearer they'd knock right into him -

the cloak didn't stop him from being solid.

He backed away as quietly as he could. A door stood

ajar to his left. It was his only hope. He squeezed

through it, holding his breath, trying not to move it,

and to his relief he managed to get inside the room

without their noticing anything. They walked straight

past, and Harry leaned against the wall, breathing

deeply, listening to their footsteps dying away. That

had been close, very close. It was a few seconds

before he noticed anything about the room he had

hidden in.

It looked like an unused classroom. The dark shapes

of desks and chairs were piled against the walls, and

there was an upturned wastepaper basket - but

propped against the wall facing him was something

that didn't look as if it belonged there, something that

looked as if someone had just put it there to keep it

out of the way.

It was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling,

with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed

feet. There was an inscription carved around the top:

Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

His panic fading now that there was no sound of Filch

and Snape, Harry moved nearer to the mirror,

wanting to look at himself but see no reflection again.

He stepped in front of it.

He had to clap his hands to his mouth to stop himself

from screaming. He whirled around. His heart was

pounding far more furiously than when the book had

screamed - for he had seen not only himself in the

mirror, but a whole crowd of people standing right

behind him.

But the room was empty. Breathing very fast, he

turned slowly back to the mirror.

There he was, reflected in it, white and scared-

looking, and there, reflected behind him, were at least

ten others. Harry looked over his shoulder - but still,

no one was there. Or were they all invisible, too? Was

he in fact in a room full of invisible people and this

mirrors trick was that it reflected them, invisible or

not?

He looked in the mirror again. A woman standing

right behind his reflection was smiling at him and

waving. He reached out a hand and felt the air behind

him. If she was really there, he'd touch her, their

reflections were so close together, but he felt only air

- she and the others existed only in the mirror.

She was a very pretty woman. She had dark red hair

and her eyes - her eyes are just like mine, Harry

thought, edging a little closer to the glass. Bright

green - exactly the same shape, but then he noticed

that she was crying; smiling, but crying at the same

time. The tall, thin, black-haired man standing next

to her put his arm around her. He wore glasses, and

his hair was very untidy. It stuck up at the back, just

as Harry's did.

Harry was so close to the mirror now that his nose

was nearly touching that of his reflection.

"Mom?" he whispered. "Dad?"

They just looked at him, smiling. And slowly, Harry

looked into the faces of the other people in the mirror,

and saw other pairs of green eyes like his, other noses

like his, even a little old man who looked as though

he had Harry's knobbly knees - Harry was looking at

his family, for the first time in his life.

The Potters smiled and waved at Harry and he stared

hungrily back at them, his hands pressed flat against

the glass as though he was hoping to fall right

through it and reach them. He had a powerful kind of

ache inside him, half joy, half terrible sadness.

How long he stood there, he didn't know. The

reflections did not fade and he looked and looked

until a distant noise brought him back to his senses.

He couldn't stay here, he had to find his way back to

bed. He tore his eyes away from his mother's face,

whispered, "I'll come back," and hurried from the

room.

"You could have woken me up," said Ron, crossly.

"You can come tonight, I'm going back, I want to show

you the mirror."

"I'd like to see your mom and dad," Ron said eagerly.

"And I want to see all your family, all the Weasleys,

you'll be able to show me your other brothers and

everyone."

"You can see them any old time," said Ron. "Just

come round my house this summer. Anyway, maybe

it only shows dead people. Shame about not finding

Flamel, though. Have some bacon or something, why

aren't you eating anything?"

Harry couldn't eat. He had seen his parents and

would be seeing them again tonight. He had almost

forgotten about Flamel. It didn't seem very important

anymore. Who cared what the three-headed dog was

guarding? What did it matter if Snape stole it, really?

"Are you all right?" said Ron. "You look odd."

What Harry feared most was that he might not be

able to find the mirror room again. With Ron covered

in the cloak, too, they had to walk much more slowly

the next night. They tried retracing Harry's route from

the library, wandering around the dark passageways

for nearly an hour.

"I'm freezing," said Ron. "Let's forget it and go back."

"IVo!" Harry hissed. "I know it's here somewhere."

They passed the ghost of a tall witch gliding in the

opposite direction, but saw no one else. Just as Ron

started moaning that his feet were dead with cold,

Harry spotted the suit of armor.

"It's here - just here - yes!"

They pushed the door open. Harry dropped the cloak

from around his shoulders and ran to the mirror.

There they were. His mother and father beamed at the

sight of him.

"See?" Harry whispered.

"I can't see anything."

"Look! Look at them all ... there are loads of them. ..."

"I can only see you."

"Look in it properly, go on, stand where I am."

Harry stepped aside, but with Ron in front of the

mirror, he couldn't see his family anymore, just Ron

in his paisley pajamas.

Ron, though, was staring transfixed at his image.

"Look at me!" he said.

"Can you see all your family standing around you?"

"No - I'm alone - but I'm different - I look older -

and I'm Head Boy!"

"What?"

"I am - I'm wearing the badge like Bill used to - and

I'm holding the House Cup and the Quidditch Cup -

I'm Quidditch captain, too!"

Ron tore his eyes away from this splendid sight to

look excitedly at Harry.

"Do you think this mirror shows the future?"

"How can it? All my family are dead - let me have

another look - "

"You had it to yourself all last night, give me a bit

more time."

"You're only holding the Quidditch Cup, what's

interesting about that? I want to see my parents."

"Don't push me - "

A sudden noise outside in the corridor put an end to

their discussion. They hadn't realized how loudly they

had been talking.

"Quick!"

Ron threw the cloak back over them as the luminous

eyes of Mrs. Norris came round the door. Ron and

Harry stood quite still, both thinking the same thing

- did the cloak work on cats? After what seemed an

age, she turned and left.

"This isn't safe - she might have gone for Filch, I bet

she heard us. Come on."

And Ron pulled Harry out of the room.

The snow still hadn't melted the next morning.

"Want to play chess, Harry?" said Ron.

"No."

"Why don't we go down and visit Hagrid?"

"No ... you go ..."

"I know what you're thinking about, Harry, that

mirror. Don't go back tonight."

"Why not?"

"I dunno, I've just got a bad feeling about it - and

anyway, you've had too many close shaves already.

Filch, Snape, and Mrs. Norris are wandering around.

So what if they can't see you? What if they walk into

you? What if you knock something over?"

"You sound like Hermione."

"I'm serious, Harry, don't go."

But Harry only had one thought in his head, which

was to get back in front of the mirror, and Ron wasn't

going to stop him.

That third night he found his way more quickly than

before. He was walking so fast he knew he was

making more noise than was wise, but he didn't meet

anyone.

And there were his mother and father smiling at him

again, and one of his grandfathers nodding happily.

Harry sank down to sit on the floor in front of the

mirror. There was nothing to stop him from staying

here all night with his family. Nothing at all.

Except -

"So - back again, Harry?"

Harry felt as though his insides had turned to ice. He

looked behind him. Sitting on one of the desks by the

wall was none other than Albus Dumbledore. Harry

must have walked straight past him, so desperate to

get to the mirror he hadn't noticed him.

"I - I didn't see you, sir."

"Strange how nearsighted being invisible can make

you," said Dumbledore, and Harry was relieved to see

that he was smiling.

"So," said Dumbledore, slipping off the desk to sit on

the floor with Harry, "you, like hundreds before you,

have discovered the delights of the Mirror of Erised."

"I didn't know it was called that, sir."

"But I expect you've realized by now what it does?"

"It - well - it shows me my family - "

"And it showed your friend Ron himself as Head Boy."

"How did you know - ?"

"I don't need a cloak to become invisible," said

Dumbledore gently. "Now, can you think what the

Mirror of Erised shows us all?"

Harry shook his head.

"Let me explain. The happiest man on earth would be

able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror,

that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly

as he is. Does that help?"

Harry thought. Then he said slowly, "It shows us

what we want ... whatever we want ..."

"Yes and no," said Dumbledore quietly. "It shows us

nothing more or less than the deepest, most

desperate desire of our hearts. You, who have never

known your family, see them standing around you.

Ronald Weasley, who has always been overshadowed

by his brothers, sees himself standing alone, the best

of all of them. However, this mirror will give us

neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away

before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been

driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or

even possible.

"The Mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow,

Harry, and I ask you not to go looking for it again. If

you ever do run across it, you will now be prepared. It

does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live,

remember that. Now, why don't you put that

admirable cloak back on and get off to bed?"

Harry stood up.

"Sir - Professor Dumbledore? Can I ask you

something?"

"Obviously, you've just done so," Dumbledore smiled.

"You may ask me one more thing, however."

"What do you see when you look in the mirror?"

"I? I see myself holding a pair of thick, woolen socks."

Harry stared.

"One can never have enough socks," said

Dumbledore. "Another Christmas has come and gone

and I didn't get a single pair. People will insist on

giving me books."

It was only when he was back in bed that it struck

Harry that Dumbledore might not have been quite

truthful. But then, he thought, as he shoved

Scabbers off his pillow, it had been quite a personal

question.

NICHOLAS FLAMBL

Dumbledore had convinced Harry not to go looking

for the Mirror of Erised again, and for the rest of the

Christmas holidays the Invisibility Cloak stayed

folded at the bottom of his trunk. Harry wished he

could forget what he'd seen in the mirror as easily,

but he couldn't. He started having nightmares. Over

and over again he dreamed about his parents

disappearing in a flash of green light, while a high

voice cackled with laughter.

"You see, Dumbledore was right, that mirror could

drive you mad," said Ron, when Harry told him about

these dreams.

Hermione, who came back the day before term

started, took a different view of things. She was torn

between horror at the idea of Harry being out of bed,

roaming the school three nights in a row ("If Filch had

caught you!"), and disappointment that he hadn't at

least found out who Nicolas Flamel was.

They had almost given up hope of ever finding Flamel

in a library book, even though Harry was still sure

he'd read the name somewhere. Once term had

started, they were back to skimming through books

for ten minutes during their breaks. Harry had even

less time than the other two, because Quidditch

practice had started again.

Wood was working the team harder than ever. Even

the endless rain that had replaced the snow couldn't

dampen his spirits. The Weasleys complained that

Wood was becoming a fanatic, but Harry was on

Wood's side. If they won their next match, against

Hufflepuff, they would overtake Slytherin in the

House Championship for the first time in seven years.

Quite apart from wanting to win, Harry found that he

had fewer nightmares when he was tired out after

training.

Then, during one particularly wet and muddy practice

session, Wood gave the team a bit of bad news. He'd

just gotten very angry with the Weasleys, who kept

dive-bombing each other and pretending to fall off

their brooms.

"Will you stop messing around!" he yelled. "That's

exactly the sort of thing that'll lose us the match!

Snape's refereeing this time, and he'll be looking for

any excuse to knock points off Gryffindor!"

George Weasley really did fall off his broom at these

words.

" Snape's refereeing?" he spluttered through a

mouthful of mud. "When's he ever refereed a

Quidditch match? He's not going to be fair if we might

overtake Slytherin."

The rest of the team landed next to George to

complain, too.

"It's not my fault," said Wood. "We've just got to make

sure we play a clean game, so Snape hasn't got an

excuse to pick on us."

Which was all very well, thought Harry, but he had

another reason for not wanting Snape near him while

he was playing Quidditch. ...

The rest of the team hung back to talk to one another

as usual at the end of practice, but Harry headed

straight back to the Gryffindor common room, where

he found Ron and Hermione playing chess. Chess was

the only thing Hermione ever lost at, something Harry

and Ron thought was very good for her.

"Don't talk to me for a moment," said Ron when Harry

sat down next to him, "I need to concern" He caught

sight of Harry's face. "What's the matter with you?

You look terrible."

Speaking quietly so that no one else would hear,

Harry told the other two about Snape 's sudden,

sinister desire to be a Quidditch referee.

"Don't play," said Hermione at once.

"Say you're ill," said Ron.

"Pretend to break your leg," Hermione suggested.

" Really break your leg," said Ron.

"I can't," said Harry. "There isn't a reserve Seeker. If I

back out, Gryffindor can't play at all."

At that moment Neville toppled into the common

room. How he had managed to climb through the

portrait hole was anyone's guess, because his legs

had been stuck together with what they recognized at

once as the Leg-Locker Curse. He must have had to

bunny hop all the way up to Gryffindor Tower.

Everyone fell over laughing except Hermione, who

leapt up and performed the countercurse. Neville's

legs sprang apart and he got to his feet, trembling.

"What happened?" Hermione asked him, leading him

over to sit with Harry and Ron.

"Malfoy," said Neville shakily. "I met him outside the

library. He said he'd been looking for someone to

practice that on."

"Go to Professor McGonagall!" Hermione urged

Neville. "Report him!"

Neville shook his head.

"I don't want more trouble," he mumbled.

"You've got to stand up to him, Neville!" said Ron.

"He's used to walking all over people, but that's no

reason to lie down in front of him and make it easier."

"There's no need to tell me I'm not brave enough to be

in Gryffindor, Malfoy's already done that," Neville

choked out.

Harry felt in the pocket of his robes and pulled out a

Chocolate Frog, the very last one from the box

Hermione had given him for Christmas. He gave it to

Neville, who looked as though he might cry.

"You're worth twelve of Malfoy," Harry said. "The

Sorting Hat chose you for Gryffindor, didn't it? And

where's Malfoy? In stinking Slytherin."

Neville's lips twitched in a weak smile as he

unwrapped the frog.

"Thanks, Harry ... I think I'll go to bed. ... D'you want

the card, you collect them, don't you?"

As Neville walked away, Harry looked at the Famous

Wizard card.

"Dumbledore again," he said, "He was the first one I

ever - "

He gasped. He stared at the back of the card. Then he

looked up at Ron and Hermione.

"I've found him\" he whispered. "I've found Flamel! I

told you I'd read the name somewhere before, I read it

on the train coming here - listen to this:

‘Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of

the Dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the

discovery of the twelve uses of dragon's blood, and his

work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel'V'

Hermione jumped to her feet. She hadn't looked so

excited since they'd gotten back the marks for their

very first piece of homework.

"Stay there!" she said, and she sprinted up the stairs

to the girls' dormitories. Harry and Ron barely had

time to exchange mystified looks before she was

dashing back, an enormous old book in her arms.

"I never thought to look in here!" she whispered

excitedly. "I got this out of the library weeks ago for a

bit of light reading."

"Light?" said Ron, but Hermione told him to be quiet

until she'd looked something up, and started flicking

frantically through the pages, muttering to herself.

At last she found what she was looking for.

"I knew it! I knew it!"

"Are we allowed to speak yet?" said Ron grumpily.

Hermione ignored him.

"Nicolas Flamel," she whispered dramatically, "is the

only known maker of the Sorcerer's Stone\"

This didn't have quite the effect she'd expected.

"The what?" said Harry and Ron.

"Oh, honestly , don't you two read? Look - read that,

there."

She pushed the book toward them, and Harry and

Ron read:

The ancient study of alchemy is concerned with

making the Sorcerer's Stone, a legendary substance

with astonishing powers. The Stone will transform

any metal into pure gold. It also produces the Elixir of

Life, which will make the drinker immortal.

There have been many reports of the Sorcerer's Stone

over the centuries, but the only Stone currently in

existence belongs to Mr. Nicolas Flamel, the noted

alchemist and opera lover. Mr. Flamel, who celebrated

his six hundred and sixty-fifth birthday last year,

enjoys a quiet life in Devon with his wife, Perenelle

(six hundred and fifty-eight).

"See?" said Hermione, when Harry and Ron had

finished. "The dog must be guarding Flamel's

Sorcerer's Stone! I bet he asked Dumbledore to keep

it safe for him, because they're friends and he knew

someone was after it, that's why he wanted the Stone

moved out of Gringotts!"

"A stone that makes gold and stops you from ever

dying!" said Harry. "No wonder Snape's after it!

Anyone would want it."

"And no wonder we couldn't find Flamel in that Study

of Recent Developments in Wizardry," said Ron. "He's

not exactly recent if he's six hundred and sixty-five, is

he?"

The next morning in Defense Against the Dark Arts,

while copying down different ways of treating werewolf

bites, Harry and Ron were still discussing what they'd

do with a Sorcerer's Stone if they had one. It wasn't

until Ron said he'd buy his own Quidditch team that

Harry remembered about Snape and the coming

match.

"I'm going to play," he told Ron and Hermione. "If I

don't, all the Slytherins will think I'm just too scared

to face Snape. I'll show them ... it'll really wipe the

smiles off their faces if we win."

"Just as long as we're not wiping you off the field,"

said Hermione.

As the match drew nearer, however, Harry became

more and more nervous, whatever he told Ron and

Hermione. The rest of the team wasn't too calm,

either. The idea of overtaking Slytherin in the House

Championship was wonderful, no one had done it for

seven years, but would they be allowed to, with such

a biased referee?

Harry didn't know whether he was imagining it or not,

but he seemed to keep running into Snape wherever

he went. At times, he even wondered whether Snape

was following him, trying to catch him on his own.

Potions lessons were turning into a sort of weekly

torture, Snape was so horrible to Harry. Could Snape

possibly know they'd found out about the Sorcerer's

Stone? Harry didn't see how he could - yet he

sometimes had the horrible feeling that Snape could

read minds.

Harry knew, when they wished him good luck

outside the locker rooms the next afternoon, that Ron

and Hermione were wondering whether they'd ever

see him alive again. This wasn't what you'd call

comforting. Harry hardly heard a word of Wood's pep

talk as he pulled on his Quidditch robes and picked

up his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Ron and Hermione, meanwhile, had found a place in

the stands next to Neville, who couldn't understand

why they looked so grim and worried, or why they had

both brought their wands to the match. Little did

Harry know that Ron and Hermione had been secretly

practicing the Leg-Locker Curse. They'd gotten the

idea from Malfoy using it on Neville, and were ready

to use it on Snape if he showed any sign of wanting to

hurt Harry.

"Now, don't forget, it's Locomotor Mortis," Hermione

muttered as Ron slipped his wand up his sleeve.

"I know," Ron snapped. "Don't nag."

Back in the locker room, Wood had taken Harry

aside.

"Don't want to pressure you, Potter, but if we ever

need an early capture of the Snitch it's now. Finish

the game before Snape can favor Hufflepuff too

much."

"The whole school's out there!" said Fred Weasley,

peering out of the door. "Even - blimey -

Dumbledore's come to watch!"

Harry's heart did a somersault.

"Dumbledore?" he said, dashing to the door to make

sure. Fred was right. There was no mistaking that

silver beard.

Harry could have laughed out loud with relief. He was

safe. There was simply no way that Snape would dare

to try to hurt him if Dumbledore was watching.

Perhaps that was why Snape was looking so angry as

the teams marched onto the field, something that Ron

noticed, too.

"I've never seen Snape look so mean," he told

Hermione. "Look - they're off. Ouch!"

Someone had poked Ron in the back of the head. It

was Malfoy.

"Oh, sorry, Weasley, didn't see you there."

Malfoy grinned broadly at Crabbe and Goyle.

"Wonder how long Potter's going to stay on his broom

this time? Anyone want a bet? What about you,

Weasley?"

Ron didn't answer; Snape had just awarded

Hufflepuff a penalty because George Weasley had hit

a Bludger at him. Hermione, who had all her fingers

crossed in her lap, was squinting fixedly at Harry,

who was circling the game like a hawk, looking for the

Snitch.

"You know how I think they choose people for the

Gryffindor team?" said Malfoy loudly a few minutes

later, as Snape awarded Hufflepuff another penalty

for no reason at all. "It's people they feel sorry for.

See, there's Potter, who's got no parents, then there's

the Weasleys, who've got no money - you should be

on the team, Longbottom, you've got no brains."

Neville went bright red but turned in his seat to face

Malfoy.

"I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy," he stammered.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle howled with laughter, but

Ron, still not daring to take his eyes from the game,

said, "You tell him, Neville."

"Longbottom, if brains were gold you'd be poorer than

Weasley, and that's saying something."

Ron's nerves were already stretched to the breaking

point with anxiety about Harry.

"I'm warning you, Malfoy - one more word - "

"Ron!" said Hermione suddenly, "Harry - !"

"What? Where?"

Harry had suddenly gone into a spectacular dive,

which drew gasps and cheers from the crowd.

Hermione stood up, her crossed fingers in her mouth,

as Harry streaked toward the ground like a bullet.

"You're in luck, Weasley, Potter's obviously spotted

some money on the ground!" said Malfoy.

Ron snapped. Before Malfoy knew what was

happening, Ron was on top of him, wrestling him to

the ground. Neville hesitated, then clambered over the

back of his seat to help.

"Come on, Harry!" Hermione screamed, leaping onto

her seat to watch as Harry sped straight at Snape -

she didn't even notice Malfoy and Ron rolling around

under her seat, or the scuffles and yelps coming from

the whirl of fists that was Neville, Crabbe, and Goyle.

Up in the air, Snape turned on his broomstick just in

time to see something scarlet shoot past him, missing

him by inches - the next second, Harry had pulled

out of the dive, his arm raised in triumph, the Snitch

clasped in his hand.

The stands erupted; it had to be a record, no one

could ever remember the Snitch being caught so

quickly.

"Ron! Ron! Where are you? The game's over! Harry's

won! We've won! Gryffindor is in the lead!" shrieked

Hermione, dancing up and down on her seat and

hugging Parvati Patil in the row in front.

Harry jumped off his broom, a foot from the ground.

He couldn't believe it. He'd done it - the game was

over; it had barely lasted five minutes. As Gryffindors

came spilling onto the field, he saw Snape land

nearby, white-faced and tight-lipped - then Harry felt

a hand on his shoulder and looked up into

Dumbledore's smiling face.

"Well done," said Dumbledore quietly, so that only

Harry could hear. "Nice to see you haven't been

brooding about that mirror . . . been keeping busy . . .

excellent ..."

Snape spat bitterly on the ground.

Jc Jc Jc

Harry left the locker room alone some time later, to

take his Nimbus Two Thousand back to the

broomshed. He couldn't ever remember feeling

happier. He'd really done something to be proud of

now - no one could say he was just a famous name

any more. The evening air had never smelled so

sweet. He walked over the damp grass, reliving the

last hour in his head, which was a happy blur:

Gryffindors running to lift him onto their shoulders;

Ron and Hermione in the distance, jumping up and

down, Ron cheering through a heavy nosebleed.

Harry had reached the shed. He leaned against the

wooden door and looked up at Hogwarts, with its

windows glowing red in the setting sun. Gryffindor in

the lead. He'd done it, he'd shown Snape. ...

And speaking of Snape . . .

A hooded figure came swiftly down the front steps of

the castle. Clearly not wanting to be seen, it walked

as fast as possible toward the forbidden forest.

Harry's victory faded from his mind as he watched.

He recognized the figure's prowling walk. Snape,

sneaking into the forest while everyone else was at

dinner - what was going on?

Harry jumped back on his Nimbus Two Thousand

and took off. Gliding silently over the castle he saw

Snape enter the forest at a run. He followed.

The trees were so thick he couldn't see where Snape

had gone. He flew in circles, lower and lower,

brushing the top branches of trees until he heard

voices. He glided toward them and landed noiselessly

in a towering beech tree.

He climbed carefully along one of the branches,

holding tight to his broomstick, trying to see through

the leaves.

Below, in a shadowy clearing, stood Snape, but he

wasn't alone. Quirrell was there, too. Harry couldn't

make out the look on his face, but he was stuttering

worse than ever. Harry strained to catch what they

were saying.

"... d-don't know why you wanted t-t-to meet here of

all p-places, Severus ..."

"Oh, I thought we'd keep this private," said Snape, his

voice icy. "Students aren't supposed to know about

the Sorcerer's Stone, after all."

Harry leaned forward. Quirrell was mumbling

something. Snape interrupted him.

"Have you found out how to get past that beast of

Hagrid's yet?"

"B-b-but Severus, I - "

"You don't want me as your enemy, Quirrell," said

Snape, taking a step toward him.

"I-I don't know what you - "

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

An owl hooted loudly, and Harry nearly fell out of the

tree. He steadied himself in time to hear Snape say,

" - your little bit of hocus-pocus. I'm waiting."

"B-but I d-d-don't - "

"Very well," Snape cut in. "Well have another little

chat soon, when you've had time to think things over

and decided where your loyalties lie."

He threw his cloak over his head and strode out of the

clearing. It was almost dark now, but Harry could see

Quirrell, standing quite still as though he was

petrified.

Jc Jc Jc

"Harry, where have you been?" Hermione squeaked.

"We won! You won! We won!" shouted Ron, thumping

Harry on the back. "And I gave Malfoy a black eye,

and Neville tried to take on Crabbe and Goyle single-

handed! He's still out cold but Madam Pomfrey says

he'll be all right - talk about showing Slytherin!

Everyone's waiting for you in the common room, we're

having a party, Fred and George stole some cakes and

stuff from the kitchens."

"Never mind that now," said Harry breathlessly. "Let's

find an empty room, you wait 'til you hear this. ..."

He made sure Peeves wasn't inside before shutting

the door behind them, then he told them what he'd

seen and heard.

"So we were right, it is the Sorcerer's Stone, and

Snape's trying to force Quirrell to help him get it. He

asked if he knew how to get past Fluffy - and he said

something about Quirrell's ‘hocus-pocus' - I reckon

there are other things guarding the stone apart from

Fluffy, loads of enchantments, probably, and Quirrell

would have done some anti-Dark Arts spell that

Snape needs to break through - "

"So you mean the Stone's only safe as long as Quirrell

stands up to Snape?" said Hermione in alarm.

"It'll be gone by next Tuesday," said Ron.

NORBERT THE NORWEGIAN

RIDGEBACK

Quirrell, however, must have been braver than they'd

thought. In the weeks that followed he did seem to be

getting paler and thinner, but it didn't look as though

he'd cracked yet.

Every time they passed the third-floor corridor, Harry,

Ron, and Hermione would press their ears to the door

to check that Fluffy was still growling inside. Snape

was sweeping about in his usual bad temper, which

surely meant that the Stone was still safe. Whenever

Harry passed Quirrell these days he gave him an

encouraging sort of smile, and Ron had started telling

people off for laughing at Quirrell's stutter.

Hermione, however, had more on her mind than the

Sorcerer's Stone. She had started drawing up study

schedules and color-coding all her notes. Harry and

Ron wouldn't have minded, but she kept nagging

them to do the same.

"Hermione, the exams are ages away."

"Ten weeks," Hermione snapped. "That's not ages,

that's like a second to Nicolas Flamel."

"But we're not six hundred years old," Ron reminded

her. "Anyway, what are you studying for, you already

know it all."

"What am I studying for? Are you crazy? You realize

we need to pass these exams to get into the second

year? They're very important, I should have started

studying a month ago, I don't know what's gotten into

me."

Unfortunately, the teachers seemed to be thinking

along the same lines as Hermione. They piled so

much homework on them that the Easter holidays

weren't nearly as much fun as the Christmas ones. It

was hard to relax with Hermione next to you reciting

the twelve uses of dragon's blood or practicing wand

movements. Moaning and yawning, Harry and Ron

spent most of their free time in the library with her,

trying to get through all their extra work.

"I'll never remember this," Ron burst out one

afternoon, throwing down his quill and looking

longingly out of the library window. It was the first

really fine day they'd had in months. The sky was a

clear, forget-me-not blue, and there was a feeling in

the air of summer coming.

Harry, who was looking up "Dittany" in One Thousand

Magical Herbs and Fungi, didn't look up until he

heard Ron say, "Hagrid! What are you doing in the

library?"

Hagrid shuffled into view, hiding something behind

his back. He looked very out of place in his moleskin

overcoat.

"Jus' lookin'," he said, in a shifty voice that got their

interest at once. "An' what're you lot up ter?" He

looked suddenly suspicious. "Yer not still lookin' fer

Nicolas Flamel, are yeh?"

"Oh, we found out who he is ages ago," said Ron

impressively. "And we know what that dog's guarding,

it's a Sorcerer's St - "

"Shhhh\" Hagrid looked around quickly to see if

anyone was listening. "Don' go shoutin' about it,

what's the matter with yeh?"

"There are a few things we wanted to ask you, as a

matter of fact," said Harry, "about what's guarding

the Stone apart from Fluffy - "

"SHHHH!" said Hagrid again. "Listen - come an' see

me later, I'm not promisin' I'll tell yeh anythin', mind,

but don' go rabbitin' about it in here, students aren'

s'pposed ter know. They'll think I've told yeh - "

"See you later, then," said Harry.

Hagrid shuffled off.

"What was he hiding behind his back?" said

Hermione thoughtfully.

"Do you think it had anything to do with the Stone?"

"I'm going to see what section he was in," said Ron,

who'd had enough of working. He came back a

minute later with a pile of books in his arms and

slammed them down on the table.

"Dragons'." he whispered. "Hagrid was looking up stuff

about dragons! Look at these: Dragon Species of Great

Britain and Ireland; From Egg to Inferno, A Dragon

Keeper's Guide."

"Hagrid 's always wanted a dragon, he told me so the

first time I ever met him," said Harry.

"But it's against our laws," said Ron. "Dragon

breeding was outlawed by the Warlocks' Convention

of 1709, everyone knows that. It's hard to stop

Muggles from noticing us if we're keeping dragons in

the back garden - anyway, you can't tame dragons,

it's dangerous. You should see the burns Charlie's got

off wild ones in Romania."

"But there aren't wild dragons in Britain?" said Harry.

"Of course there are," said Ron. "Common Welsh

Green and Hebridean Blacks. The Ministry of Magic

has a job hushing them up, I can tell you. Our kind

have to keep putting spells on Muggles who've spotted

them, to make them forget."

"So what on earth's Hagrid up to?" said Hermione.

When they knocked on the door of the gamekeeper's

hut an hour later, they were surprised to see that all

the curtains were closed. Hagrid called "Who is it?"

before he let them in, and then shut the door quickly

behind them.

It was stifling hot inside. Even though it was such a

warm day, there was a blazing fire in the grate.

Hagrid made them tea and offered them stoat

sandwiches, which they refused.

"So - yeh wanted to ask me somethin'?"

"Yes," said Harry. There was no point beating around

the bush. "We were wondering if you could tell us

what's guarding the Sorcerer's Stone apart from

Fluffy."

Hagrid frowned at him.

"O' course I can't," he said. "Number one, I don' know

meself. Number two, yeh know too much already, so I

wouldn' tell yeh if I could. That Stone's here fer a good

reason. It was almost stolen outta Gringotts - I

s'ppose yeh've worked that out an' all? Beats me how

yeh even know abou' Fluffy."

"Oh, come on, Hagrid, you might not want to tell us,

but you do know, you know everything that goes on

round here," said Hermione in a warm, flattering

voice. Hagrid 's beard twitched and they could tell he

was smiling. "We only wondered who had done the

guarding, really." Hermione went on. "We wondered

who Dumbledore had trusted enough to help him,

apart from you."

Hagrid 's chest swelled at these last words. Harry and

Ron beamed at Hermione.

"Well, I don' s'pose it could hurt ter tell yeh that ...

let's see ... he borrowed Fluffy from me ... then some

o' the teachers did enchantments ... Professor Sprout

- Professor Flitwick - Professor McGonagall - " he

ticked them off on his fingers, "Professor Quirrell -

an' Dumbledore himself did somethin', o' course.

Hang on, I've forgotten someone. Oh yeah, Professor

Snape."

"Snape?"

"Yeah - yer not still on abou' that, are yeh? Look,

Snape helped protect the Stone, he's not about ter

steal it."

Harry knew Ron and Hermione were thinking the

same as he was. If Snape had been in on protecting

the Stone, it must have been easy to find out how the

other teachers had guarded it. He probably knew

everything - except, it seemed, Quirrell's spell and

how to get past Fluffy.

"You're the only one who knows how to get past

Fluffy, aren't you, Hagrid?" said Harry anxiously.

"And you wouldn't tell anyone, would you? Not even

one of the teachers?"

"Not a soul knows except me an' Dumbledore," said

Hagrid proudly.

"Well, that's something," Harry muttered to the

others. "Hagrid, can we have a window open? I'm

boiling."

"Can't, Harry, sorry," said Hagrid. Harry noticed him

glance at the fire. Harry looked at it, too.

"Hagrid - what's that?"

But he already knew what it was. In the very heart of

the fire, underneath the kettle, was a huge, black egg.

"Ah," said Hagrid, fiddling nervously with his beard,

"That's - er ..."

"Where did you get it, Hagrid?" said Ron, crouching

over the fire to get a closer look at the egg. "It must've

cost you a fortune."

"Won it," said Hagrid. "Las' night. I was down in the

village havin' a few drinks an' got into a game o' cards

with a stranger. Think he was quite glad ter get rid of

it, ter be honest."

"But what are you going to do with it when it's

hatched?" said Hermione.

"Well, I've bin doin' some readin'," said Hagrid, pulling

a large book from under his pillow. "Got this outta the

library - Dragon Breeding for Pleasure and Profit -

it's a bit outta date, o' course, but it's all in here. Keep

the egg in the fire, 'cause their mothers breathe on

'em, see, an' when it hatches, feed it on a bucket o'

brandy mixed with chicken blood every half hour. An'

see here - how ter recognize diff'rent eggs - what I

got there's a Norwegian Ridge-back. They're rare,

them."

He looked very pleased with himself, but Hermione

didn't.

"Hagrid, you live in a wooden house," she said.

But Hagrid wasn't listening. He was humming merrily

as he stoked the fire.

So now they had something else to worry about: what

might happen to Hagrid if anyone found out he was

hiding an illegal dragon in his hut.

"Wonder what it's like to have a peaceful life," Ron

sighed, as evening after evening they struggled

through all the extra homework they were getting.

Hermione had now started making study schedules

for Harry and Ron, too. It was driving them nuts.

Then, one breakfast time, Hedwig brought Harry

another note from Hagrid. He had written only two

words: It's hatching.

Ron wanted to skip Herbology and go straight down to

the hut. Hermione wouldn't hear of it.

"Hermione, how many times in our lives are we going

to see a dragon hatching?"

"We've got lessons, we'll get into trouble, and that's

nothing to what Hagrid 's going to be in when someone

finds out what he's doing - "

"Shut up!" Harry whispered.

Malfoy was only a few feet away and he had stopped

dead to listen. How much had he heard? Harry didn't

like the look on Malfoy's face at all.

Ron and Hermione argued all the way to Herbology

and in the end, Hermione agreed to run down to

Hagrid's with the other two during morning break.

When the bell sounded from the castle at the end of

their lesson, the three of them dropped their trowels

at once and hurried through the grounds to the edge

of the forest. Hagrid greeted them, looking flushed

and excited.

"It's nearly out." He ushered them inside.

The egg was lying on the table. There were deep

cracks in it. Something was moving inside; a funny

clicking noise was coming from it.

They all drew their chairs up to the table and watched

with bated breath.

All at once there was a scraping noise and the egg

split open. The baby dragon flopped onto the table. It

wasn't exactly pretty; Harry thought it looked like a

crumpled, black umbrella. Its spiny wings were huge

compared to its skinny jet body, it had a long snout

with wide nostrils, the stubs of horns and bulging,

orange eyes.

It sneezed. A couple of sparks flew out of its snout.

"Isn't he beautiful?" Hagrid murmured. He reached

out a hand to stroke the dragon's head. It snapped at

his fingers, showing pointed fangs.

"Bless him, look, he knows his mommy!" said Hagrid.

"Hagrid," said Hermione, "how fast do Norwegian

Ridgebacks grow, exactly?"

Hagrid was about to answer when the color suddenly

drained from his face - he leapt to his feet and ran to

the window.

"What's the matter?"

"Someone was lookin' through the gap in the curtains

- it's a kid - he's runnin' back up ter the school."

Harry bolted to the door and looked out. Even at a

distance there was no mistaking him.

Malfoy had seen the dragon.

Something about the smile lurking on Malfoy's face

during the next week made Harry, Ron, and Hermione

very nervous. They spent most of their free time in

Hagrid 's darkened hut, trying to reason with him.

"Just let him go," Harry urged. "Set him free."

"I can't," said Hagrid. "He's too little. He'd die."

They looked at the dragon. It had grown three times

in length in just a week. Smoke kept furling out of its

nostrils. Hagrid hadn't been doing his gamekeeping

duties because the dragon was keeping him so busy.

There were empty brandy bottles and chicken

feathers all over the floor.

"I've decided to call him Norbert," said Hagrid, looking

at the dragon with misty eyes. "He really knows me

now, watch. Norbert! Norbert! Where's Mommy?"

"He's lost his marbles," Ron muttered in Harry's ear.

"Hagrid," said Harry loudly, "give it two weeks and

Norbert's going to be as long as your house. Malfoy

could go to Dumbledore at any moment."

Hagrid bit his lip.

"I - I know I can't keep him forever, but I can't jus'

dump him, can't."

Harry suddenly turned to Ron.

"Charlie," he said.

"You're losing it, too," said Ron. "I'm Ron, remember?"

"No - Charlie - your brother, Charlie. In Romania.

Studying dragons. We could send Norbert to him.

Charlie can take care of him and then put him back

in the wild!"

"Brilliant!" said Ron. "How about it, Hagrid?"

And in the end, Hagrid agreed that they could send

an owl to Charlie to ask him.

The following week dragged by. Wednesday night

found Hermione and Harry sitting alone in the

common room, long after everyone else had gone to

bed. The clock on the wall had just chimed midnight

when the portrait hole burst open. Ron appeared out

of nowhere as he pulled off Harry's Invisibility Cloak.

He had been down at Hagrid's hut, helping him feed

Norbert, who was now eating dead rats by the crate.

"It bit me!" he said, showing them his hand, which

was wrapped in a bloody handkerchief. "I'm not going

to be able to hold a quill for a week. I tell you, that

dragon's the most horrible animal I've ever met, but

the way Hagrid goes on about it, you'd think it was a

fluffy little bunny rabbit. When it bit me he told me off

for frightening it. And when I left, he was singing it a

lullaby."

There was a tap on the dark window.

"It's Hedwig!" said Harry, hurrying to let her in. "She'll

have Charlie's answer!"

The three of them put their heads together to read the

note.

Dear Ron,

How are you? Thanks for the letter - I'd be glad to

take the Norwegian Ridgeback, but it won't be easy

getting him here. I think the best thing will be to send

him over with some friends of mine who are coming to

visit me next week. Trouble is, they mustn't be seen

carrying an illegal dragon.

Could you get the Ridgeback up the tallest tower at

midnight on Saturday? They can meet you there and

take him away while it's still dark.

Send me an answer as soon as possible.

Love,

Charlie

They looked at one another.

"We've got the Invisibility Cloak," said Harry. "It

shouldn't be too difficult - I think the cloak's big

enough to cover two of us and Norbert."

It was a mark of how bad the last week had been that

the other two agreed with him. Anything to get rid of

Norbert - and Malfoy.

There was a hitch. By the next morning, Ron's bitten

hand had swollen to twice its usual size. He didn't

know whether it was safe to go to Madam Pomfrey -

would she recognize a dragon bite? By the afternoon,

though, he had no choice. The cut had turned a nasty

shade of green. It looked as if Norbert's fangs were

poisonous.

Harry and Hermione rushed up to the hospital wing

at the end of the day to find Ron in a terrible state in

bed.

"It's not just my hand," he whispered, "although that

feels like it's about to fall off. Malfoy told Madam

Pomfrey he wanted to borrow one of my books so he

could come and have a good laugh at me. He kept

threatening to tell her what really bit me - I've told

her it was a dog, but I don't think she believes me - I

shouldn't have hit him at the Quidditch match, that's

why he's doing this."

Harry and Hermione tried to calm Ron down.

"It'll all be over at midnight on Saturday," said

Hermione, but this didn't soothe Ron at all. On the

contrary, he sat bolt upright and broke into a sweat.

"Midnight on Saturday!" he said in a hoarse voice.

"Oh no - oh no - I've just remembered - Charlie's

letter was in that book Malfoy took, he's going to

know we're getting rid of Norbert."

Harry and Hermione didn't get a chance to answer.

Madam Pomfrey came over at that moment and made

them leave, saying Ron needed sleep.

"It's too late to change the plan now," Harry told

Hermione. "We haven't got time to send Charlie

another owl, and this could be our only chance to get

rid of Norbert. We'll have to risk it. And we have got

the Invisibility Cloak, Malfoy doesn't know about

that."

They found Fang the boarhound sitting outside with a

bandaged tail when they went to tell Hagrid, who

opened a window to talk to them.

"I won't let you in," he puffed. "Norbert's at a tricky

stage - nothin' I can't handle."

When they told him about Charlie's letter, his eyes

filled with tears, although that might have been

because Norbert had just bitten him on the leg.

"Aargh! It's all right, he only got my boot - jus'

playin' - he's only a baby, after all."

The baby banged its tail on the wall, making the

windows rattle. Harry and Hermione walked back to

the castle feeling Saturday couldn't come quickly

enough.

They would have felt sorry for Hagrid when the time

came for him to say good-bye to Norbert if they hadn't

been so worried about what they had to do. It was a

very dark, cloudy night, and they were a bit late

arriving at Hagrid 's hut because they'd had to wait for

Peeves to get out of their way in the entrance hall,

where he'd been playing tennis against the wall.

Hagrid had Norbert packed and ready in a large crate.

"He's got lots o' rats an' some brandy fer the journey,"

said Hagrid in a muffled voice. "An' I've packed his

teddy bear in case he gets lonely."

From inside the crate came ripping noises that

sounded to Harry as though the teddy was having his

head torn off.

"Bye-bye, Norbert!" Hagrid sobbed, as Harry and

Hermione covered the crate with the Invisibility Cloak

and stepped underneath it themselves. "Mommy will

never forget you!"

How they managed to get the crate back up to the

castle, they never knew. Midnight ticked nearer as

they heaved Norbert up the marble staircase in the

entrance hall and along the dark corridors. Up

another staircase, then another - even one of Harry's

shortcuts didn't make the work much easier.

"Nearly there!" Harry panted as they reached the

corridor beneath the tallest tower.

Then a sudden movement ahead of them made them

almost drop the crate. Forgetting that they were

already invisible, they shrank into the shadows,

staring at the dark outlines of two people grappling

with each other ten feet away. A lamp flared.

Professor McGonagall, in a tartan bathrobe and a hair

net, had Malfoy by the ear.

"Detention!" she shouted. "And twenty points from

Slytherin! Wandering around in the middle of the

night, how dare you - "

"You don't understand, Professor. Harry Potter's

coming - he's got a dragon!"

"What utter rubbish! How dare you tell such lies!

Come on - I shall see Professor Snape about you,

Malfoy!"

The steep spiral staircase up to the top of the tower

seemed the easiest thing in the world after that. Not

until they'd stepped out into the cold night air did

they throw off the cloak, glad to be able to breathe

properly again. Hermione did a sort of jig.

"Malfoy's got detention! I could sing!"

"Don't," Harry advised her.

Chuckling about Malfoy, they waited, Norbert

thrashing about in his crate. About ten minutes later,

four broomsticks came swooping down out of the

darkness.

Charlie's friends were a cheery lot. They showed

Harry and Hermione the harness they'd rigged up, so

they could suspend Norbert between them. They all

helped buckle Norbert safely into it and then Harry

and Hermione shook hands with the others and

thanked them very much.

At last, Norbert was going ... going ... gone.

They slipped back down the spiral staircase, their

hearts as light as their hands, now that Norbert was

off them. No more dragon - Malfoy in detention -

what could spoil their happiness?

The answer to that was waiting at the foot of the

stairs. As they stepped into the corridor, Filch's face

loomed suddenly out of the darkness.

"Well, well, well," he whispered, "we are in trouble."

They'd left the Invisibility Cloak on top of the tower.

THE FORBIDDEN FOREST

Things couldn't have been worse.

Filch took them down to Professor McGonagall's

study on the first floor, where they sat and waited

without saying a word to each other. Hermione was

trembling. Excuses, alibis, and wild cover-up stories

chased each other around Harry's brain, each more

feeble than the last. He couldn't see how they were

going to get out of trouble this time. They were

cornered. How could they have been so stupid as to

forget the cloak? There was no reason on earth that

Professor McGonagall would accept for their being out

of bed and creeping around the school in the dead of

night, let alone being up the tallest Astronomy Tower,

which was out-of-bounds except for classes. Add

Norbert and the Invisibility Cloak, and they might as

well be packing their bags already.

Had Harry thought that things couldn't have been

worse? He was wrong. When Professor McGonagall

appeared, she was leading Neville.

"Harry!" Neville burst out, the moment he saw the

other two. "I was trying to find you to warn you, I

heard Malfoy saying he was going to catch you, he

said you had a drag - "

Harry shook his head violently to shut Neville up, but

Professor McGonagall had seen. She looked more

likely to breathe fire than Norbert as she towered over

the three of them.

"I would never have believed it of any of you. Mr. Filch

says you were up in the Astronomy Tower. It's one

o'clock in the morning. Explain yourselves."

It was the first time Hermione had ever failed to

answer a teacher's question. She was staring at her

slippers, as still as a statue.

"I think I've got a good idea of what's been going on,"

said Professor McGonagall. "It doesn't take a genius

to work it out. You fed Draco Malfoy some cock-and-

bull story about a dragon, trying to get him out of bed

and into trouble. I've already caught him. I suppose

you think it's funny that Longbottom here heard the

story and believed it, too?"

Harry caught Neville's eye and tried to tell him

without words that this wasn't true, because Neville

was looking stunned and hurt. Poor, blundering

Neville - Harry knew what it must have cost him to

try and find them in the dark, to warn them.

"I'm disgusted," said Professor McGonagall. "Four

students out of bed in one night! I've never heard of

such a thing before! You, Miss Granger, I thought you

had more sense. As for you, Mr. Potter, I thought

Gryffindor meant more to you than this. All three of

you will receive detentions - yes, you too, Mr.

Longbottom, nothing gives you the right to walk

around school at night, especially these days, it's very

dangerous - and fifty points will be taken from

Gryffindor."

"Fifty?" Harry gasped - they would lose the lead, the

lead he'd won in the last Quidditch match.

"Fifty points each," said Professor McGonagall,

breathing heavily through her long, pointed nose.

"Professor - please - "

"You can't-"

"Don't tell me what I can and can't do, Potter. Now get

back to bed, all of you. I've never been more ashamed

of Gryffindor students."

A hundred and fifty points lost. That put Gryffindor in

last place. In one night, they'd ruined any chance

Gryffindor had had for the House Cup. Harry felt as

though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach.

How could they ever make up for this?

Harry didn't sleep all night. He could hear Neville

sobbing into his pillow for what seemed like hours.

Harry couldn't think of anything to say to comfort

him. He knew Neville, like himself, was dreading the

dawn. What would happen when the rest of

Gryffindor found out what they'd done?

At first, Gryffindors passing the giant hourglasses

that recorded the House points the next day thought

there 'd been a mistake. How could they suddenly

have a hundred and fifty points fewer than yesterday?

And then the story started to spread: Harry Potter,

the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch

matches, had lost them all those points, him and a

couple of other stupid first years.

From being one of the most popular and admired

people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most

hated. Even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs turned on

him, because everyone had been longing to see

Slytherin lose the House Cup. Everywhere Harry

went, people pointed and didn't trouble to lower their

voices as they insulted him. Slytherins, on the other

hand, clapped as he walked past them, whistling and

cheering, "Thanks Potter, we owe you one!"

Only Ron stood by him.

"They'll all forget this in a few weeks. Fred and George

have lost loads of points in all the time they've been

here, and people still like them."

"They've never lost a hundred and fifty points in one

go, though, have they?" said Harry miserably.

"Well - no," Ron admitted.

It was a bit late to repair the damage, but Harry

swore to himself not to meddle in things that weren't

his business from now on. He'd had it with sneaking

around and spying. He felt so ashamed of himself that

he went to Wood and offered to resign from the

Quidditch team.

"Resign?" Wood thundered. "What good'll that do?

How are we going to get any points back if we can't

win at Quidditch?"

But even Quidditch had lost its fun. The rest of the

team wouldn't speak to Harry during practice, and if

they had to speak about him, they called him "the

Seeker."

Hermione and Neville were suffering, too. They didn't

have as bad a time as Harry, because they weren't as

well-known, but nobody would speak to them, either.

Hermione had stopped drawing attention to herself in

class, keeping her head down and working in silence.

Harry was almost glad that the exams weren't far

away. All the studying he had to do kept his mind off

his misery. He, Ron, and Hermione kept to

themselves, working late into the night, trying to

remember the ingredients in complicated potions,

learn charms and spells by heart, memorize the dates

of magical discoveries and goblin rebellions. ...

Then, about a week before the exams were due to

start, Harry's new resolution not to interfere in

anything that didn't concern him was put to an

unexpected test. Walking back from the library on his

own one afternoon, he heard somebody whimpering

from a classroom up ahead. As he drew closer, he

heard Quirrell's voice.

"No - no - not again, please - "

It sounded as though someone was threatening him.

Harry moved closer.

"All right - all right - " he heard Quirrell sob.

Next second, Quirrell came hurrying out of the

classroom straightening his turban. He was pale and

looked as though he was about to cry. He strode out

of sight; Harry didn't think Quirrell had even noticed

him. He waited until Quirrell's footsteps had

disappeared, then peered into the classroom. It was

empty, but a door stood ajar at the other end. Harry

was halfway toward it before he remembered what

he'd promised himself about not meddling.

All the same, he'd have gambled twelve Sorcerer's

Stones that Snape had just left the room, and from

what Harry had just heard, Snape would be walking

with a new spring in his step - Quirrell seemed to

have given in at last.

Harry went back to the library, where Hermione was

testing Ron on Astronomy. Harry told them what he'd

heard.

"Snape's done it, then!" said Ron. "If Quirrell's told

him how to break his Anti-Dark Force spell - "

"There's still Fluffy, though," said Hermione.

"Maybe Snape's found out how to get past him

without asking Hagrid," said Ron, looking up at the

thousands of books surrounding them. "I bet there's a

book somewhere in here telling you how to get past a

giant three-headed dog. So what do we do, Harry?"

The light of adventure was kindling again in Ron's

eyes, but Hermione answered before Harry could.

"Go to Dumbledore. That's what we should have done

ages ago. If we try anything ourselves we'll be thrown

out for sure."

"But we've got no proof." said Harry. "Quirrell's too

scared to back us up. Snape's only got to say he

doesn't know how the troll got in at Halloween and

that he was nowhere near the third floor - who do

you think they'll believe, him or us? It's not exactly a

secret we hate him, Dumbledore 'll think we made it

up to get him sacked. Filch wouldn't help us if his life

depended on it, he's too friendly with Snape, and the

more students get thrown out, the better, he'll think.

And don't forget, we're not supposed to know about

the Stone or Fluffy. That'll take a lot of explaining."

Hermione looked convinced, but Ron didn't.

"If we just do a bit of poking around - "

"No," said Harry flatly, "we've done enough poking

around."

He pulled a map of Jupiter toward him and started to

learn the names of its moons.

The following morning, notes were delivered to Harry,

Hermione, and Neville at the breakfast table. They

were all the same:

Your detention will take place at eleven o'clock

tonight.

Meet Mr. Filch in the entrance hall.

Professor M. McGonagall

Harry had forgotten they still had detentions to do in

the furor over the points they'd lost. He half expected

Hermione to complain that this was a whole night of

studying lost, but she didn't say a word. Like Harry,

she felt they deserved what they'd got.

At eleven o'clock that night, they said good-bye to Ron

in the common room and went down to the entrance

hall with Neville. Filch was already there - and so

was Malfoy. Harry had also forgotten that Malfoy had

gotten a detention, too.

"Follow me," said Filch, lighting a lamp and leading

them outside.

"I bet you'll think twice about breaking a school rule

again, won't you, eh?" he said, leering at them. "Oh

yes . . . hard work and pain are the best teachers if you

ask me. ... It's just a pity they let the old

punishments die out . . . hang you by your wrists from

the ceiling for a few days, I've got the chains still in

my office, keep 'em well oiled in case they're ever

needed. ... Right, off we go, and don't think of running

off, now, it'll be worse for you if you do."

They marched off across the dark grounds. Neville

kept sniffing. Harry wondered what their punishment

was going to be. It must be something really horrible,

or Filch wouldn't be sounding so delighted.

The moon was bright, but clouds scudding across it

kept throwing them into darkness. Ahead, Harry

could see the lighted windows of Hagrid's hut. Then

they heard a distant shout.

"Is that you, Filch? Hurry up, I want ter get started."

Harry's heart rose; if they were going to be working

with Hagrid it wouldn't be so bad. His relief must

have showed in his face, because Filch said, "I

suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself with

that oaf? Well, think again, boy - it's into the forest

you're going and I'm much mistaken if you'll all come

out in one piece."

At this, Neville let out a little moan, and Malfoy

stopped dead in his tracks.

"The forest?" he repeated, and he didn't sound quite

as cool as usual. "We can't go in there at night -

there's all sorts of things in there - werewolves, I

heard."

Neville clutched the sleeve of Harry's robe and made a

choking noise.

"That's your problem, isn't it?" said Filch, his voice

cracking with glee. "Should've thought of them

werewolves before you got in trouble, shouldn't you?"

Hagrid came striding toward them out of the dark,

Fang at his heel. He was carrying his large crossbow,

and a quiver of arrows hung over his shoulder.

"Abou' time," he said. "I bin waitin' fer half an hour

already. All right, Harry, Hermione?"

"I shouldn't be too friendly to them, Hagrid," said

Filch coldly, "they're here to be punished, after all."

"That's why yer late, is it?" said Hagrid, frowning at

Filch. "Bin lecturin' them, eh? 'Snot your place ter do

that. Yeh've done yer bit, I'll take over from here."

"I'll be back at dawn," said Filch, "for what's left of

them," he added nastily, and he turned and started

back toward the castle, his lamp bobbing away in the

darkness.

Malfoy now turned to Hagrid.

"I'm not going in that forest," he said, and Harry was

pleased to hear the note of panic in his voice.

"Yeh are if yeh want ter stay at Hogwarts," said

Hagrid fiercely. "Yeh've done wrong an' now yeh've got

ter pay fer it."

"But this is servant stuff, it's not for students to do. I

thought we'd be copying lines or something, if my

father knew I was doing this, he'd - "

" - tell yer that's how it is at Hogwarts," Hagrid

growled. "Copyin' lines! What good's that ter anyone?

Yeh'll do summat useful or yeh'll get out. If yeh think

yer father'd rather you were expelled, then get back

off ter the castle an' pack. Go on!"

Malfoy didn't move. He looked at Hagrid furiously, but

then dropped his gaze.

"Right then," said Hagrid, "now, listen carefully,

'cause it's dangerous what we're gonna do tonight, an'

I don' want no one takin' risks. Follow me over here a

moment."

He led them to the very edge of the forest. Holding his

lamp up high, he pointed down a narrow, winding

earth track that disappeared into the thick black

trees. A light breeze lifted their hair as they looked

into the forest.

"Look there," said Hagrid, "see that stuff shinin' on

the ground? Silvery stuff? That's unicorn blood.

There's a unicorn in there bin hurt badly by summat.

This is the second time in a week. I found one dead

last Wednesday. We're gonna try an' find the poor

thing. We might have ter put it out of its misery."

"And what if whatever hurt the unicorn finds us

first?" said Malfoy, unable to keep the fear out of his

voice.

"There's nothin' that lives in the forest that'll hurt yeh

if yer with me or Fang," said Hagrid. "An' keep ter the

path. Right, now, we're gonna split inter two parties

an' follow the trail in diff'rent directions. There's blood

all over the place, it must've bin staggerin' around

since last night at least."

"I want Fang," said Malfoy quickly, looking at Fang's

long teeth.

"All right, but I warn yeh, he's a coward," said Hagrid.

"So me, Harry, an' Hermione'll go one way an' Draco,

Neville, an' Fang'll go the other. Now, if any of us

finds the unicorn, we'll send up green sparks, right?

Get yer wands out an' practice now - that's it - an'

if anyone gets in trouble, send up red sparks, an' we'll

all come an' find yeh - so, be careful - let's go."

The forest was black and silent. A little way into it

they reached a fork in the earth path, and Harry,

Hermione, and Hagrid took the left path while Malfoy,

Neville, and Fang took the right.

They walked in silence, their eyes on the ground.

Every now and then a ray of moonlight through the

branches above lit a spot of silver-blue blood on the

fallen leaves.

Harry saw that Hagrid looked very worried.

" Could a werewolf be killing the unicorns?" Harry

asked.

"Not fast enough," said Hagrid. "It's not easy ter catch

a unicorn, they're powerful magic creatures. I never

knew one ter be hurt before."

They walked past a mossy tree stump. Harry could

hear running water; there must be a stream

somewhere close by. There were still spots of unicorn

blood here and there along the winding path.

"You all right, Hermione?" Hagrid whispered. "Don'

worry, it can't've gone far if it's this badly hurt, an'

then well be able ter - GET BEHIND THAT TREE!"

Hagrid seized Harry and Hermione and hoisted them

off the path behind a towering oak. He pulled out an

arrow and fitted it into his crossbow, raising it, ready

to fire. The three of them listened. Something was

slithering over dead leaves nearby: it sounded like a

cloak trailing along the ground. Hagrid was squinting

up the dark path, but after a few seconds, the sound

faded away.

"I knew it," he murmured. "There's summat in here

that shouldn' be."

"A werewolf?" Harry suggested.

"That wasn' no werewolf an' it wasn' no unicorn,

neither," said Hagrid grimly. "Right, follow me, but

careful, now."

They walked more slowly, ears straining for the

faintest sound. Suddenly, in a clearing ahead,

something definitely moved.

"Who's there?" Hagrid called. "Show yerself - I'm

armed!"

And into the clearing came - was it a man, or a

horse? To the waist, a man, with red hair and beard,

but below that was a horse's gleaming chestnut body

with a long, reddish tail. Harry and Hermione's jaws

dropped.

"Oh, it's you, Ronan," said Hagrid in relief. "How are

yeh?"

He walked forward and shook the centaur's hand.

"Good evening to you, Hagrid," said Ronan. He had a

deep, sorrowful voice. "Were you going to shoot me?"

"Can't be too careful, Ronan," said Hagrid, patting his

crossbow. "There's summat bad loose in this forest.

This is Harry Potter an' Hermione Granger, by the

way. Students up at the school. An' this is Ronan,

you two. He's a centaur."

"We'd noticed," said Hermione faintly.

"Good evening," said Ronan. "Students, are you? And

do you learn much, up at the school?"

"Erm - "

"A bit," said Hermione timidly.

"A bit. Well, that's something." Ronan sighed. He

flung back his head and stared at the sky. "Mars is

bright tonight."

"Yeah," said Hagrid, glancing up, too. "Listen, I'm glad

we've run inter yeh, Ronan, 'cause there's a unicorn

bin hurt - you seen anythin'?"

Ronan didn't answer immediately. He stared

unblinkingly upward, then sighed again.

"Always the innocent are the first victims," he said.

"So it has been for ages past, so it is now."

"Yeah," said Hagrid, "but have yeh seen anythin',

Ronan? Anythin' unusual?"

"Mars is bright tonight," Ronan repeated, while

Hagrid watched him impatiently. "Unusually bright."

"Yeah, but I was meanin' anythin' unusual a bit

nearer home," said Hagrid. "So yeh haven't noticed

anythin' strange?"

Yet again, Ronan took a while to answer. At last, he

said, "The forest hides many secrets."

A movement in the trees behind Ronan made Hagrid

raise his bow again, but it was only a second centaur,

black-haired and -bodied and wilder-looking than

Ronan.

"Hullo, Bane," said Hagrid. "All right?"

"Good evening, Hagrid, I hope you are well?"

"Well enough. Look, I've jus' bin askin' Ronan, you

seen anythin' odd in here lately? There's a unicorn

bin injured - would yeh know anythin' about it?"

Bane walked over to stand next to Ronan. He looked

skyward.

"Mars is bright tonight," he said simply.

"We've heard," said Hagrid grumpily. "Well, if either of

you do see anythin', let me know, won't yeh? We'll be

off, then."

Harry and Hermione followed him out of the clearing,

staring over their shoulders at Ronan and Bane until

the trees blocked their view.

"Never," said Hagrid irritably, "try an' get a straight

answer out of a centaur. Ruddy stargazers. Not

interested in anythin' closer'n the moon."

"Are there many of them in here?" asked Hermione.

"Oh, a fair few. . . . Keep themselves to themselves

mostly, but they're good enough about turnin' up if

ever I want a word. They're deep, mind, centaurs ...

they know things ... jus' don' let on much."

"D'you think that was a centaur we heard earlier?"

said Harry.

"Did that sound like hooves to you? Nah, if yeh ask

me, that was what's bin killin' the unicorns - never

heard anythin' like it before."

They walked on through the dense, dark trees. Harry

kept looking nervously over his shoulder. He had the

nasty feeling they were being watched. He was very

glad they had Hagrid and his crossbow with them.

They had just passed a bend in the path when

Hermione grabbed Hagrid 's arm.

"Hagrid! Look! Red sparks, the others are in trouble!"

"You two wait here!" Hagrid shouted. "Stay on the

path, I'll come back for yeh!"

They heard him crashing away through the

undergrowth and stood looking at each other, very

scared, until they couldn't hear anything but the

rustling of leaves around them.

"You don't think they've been hurt, do you?"

whispered Hermione.

"I don't care if Malfoy has, but if something's got

Neville ... it's our fault he's here in the first place."

The minutes dragged by. Their ears seemed sharper

than usual. Harry's seemed to be picking up every

sigh of the wind, every cracking twig. What was going

on? Where were the others?

At last, a great crunching noise announced Hagrid's

return. Malfoy, Neville, and Fang were with him.

Hagrid was fuming. Malfoy, it seemed, had sneaked

up behind Neville and grabbed him as a joke. Neville

had panicked and sent up the sparks.

"Well be lucky ter catch anythin' now, with the racket

you two were makin'. Right, we're changin' groups -

Neville, you stay with me an' Hermione, Harry, you go

with Fang an' this idiot. I'm sorry," Hagrid added in a

whisper to Harry, "but he'll have a harder time

frightenin' you, an' we've gotta get this done."

So Harry set off into the heart of the forest with

Malfoy and Fang. They walked for nearly half an

hour, deeper and deeper into the forest, until the path

became almost impossible to follow because the trees

were so thick. Harry thought the blood seemed to be

getting thicker. There were splashes on the roots of a

tree, as though the poor creature had been thrashing

around in pain close by. Harry could see a clearing

ahead, through the tangled branches of an ancient

oak.

"Look - " he murmured, holding out his arm to stop

Malfoy.

Something bright white was gleaming on the ground.

They inched closer.

It was the unicorn all right, and it was dead. Harry

had never seen anything so beautiful and sad. Its

long, slender legs were stuck out at odd angles where

it had fallen and its mane was spread pearly-white on

the dark leaves.

Harry had taken one step toward it when a slithering

sound made him freeze where he stood. A bush on

the edge of the clearing quivered. ... Then, out of the

shadows, a hooded figure came crawling across the

ground like some stalking beast. Harry, Malfoy, and

Fang stood transfixed. The cloaked figure reached the

unicorn, lowered its head over the wound in the

animals side, and began to drink its blood.

"AAAAAAAAAAARGH ! "

Malfoy let out a terrible scream and bolted - so did

Fang. The hooded figure raised its head and looked

right at Harry - unicorn blood was dribbling down its

front. It got to its feet and came swiftly toward Harry

- he couldn't move for fear.

Then a pain like he'd never felt before pierced his

head; it was as though his scar were on fire. Half

blinded, he staggered backward. He heard hooves

behind him, galloping, and something jumped clean

over Harry, charging at the figure.

The pain in Harry's head was so bad he fell to his

knees. It took a minute or two to pass. When he

looked up, the figure had gone. A centaur was

standing over him, not Ronan or Bane; this one

looked younger; he had white-blond hair and a

palomino body.

"Are you all right?" said the centaur, pulling Harry to

his feet.

"Yes - thank you - what was that?"

The centaur didn't answer. He had astonishingly blue

eyes, like pale sapphires. He looked carefully at

Harry, his eyes lingering on the scar that stood out,

livid, on Harry's forehead.

"You are the Potter boy," he said. "You had better get

back to Hagrid. The forest is not safe at this time -

especially for you. Can you ride? It will be quicker

this way.

"My name is Firenze," he added, as he lowered

himself on to his front legs so that Harry could

clamber onto his back.

There was suddenly a sound of more galloping from

the other side of the clearing. Ronan and Bane came

bursting through the trees, their flanks heaving and

sweaty.

"Firenze!" Bane thundered. "What are you doing? You

have a human on your back! Have you no shame? Are

you a common mule?"

"Do you realize who this is?" said Firenze. "This is the

Potter boy. The quicker he leaves this forest, the

better."

"What have you been telling him?" growled Bane.

"Remember, Firenze, we are sworn not to set

ourselves against the heavens. Have we not read what

is to come in the movements of the planets?"

Ronan pawed the ground nervously. "I'm sure Firenze

thought he was acting for the best," he said in his

gloomy voice.

Bane kicked his back legs in anger.

"For the best! What is that to do with us? Centaurs

are concerned with what has been foretold! It is not

our business to run around like donkeys after stray

humans in our forest!"

Firenze suddenly reared on to his hind legs in anger,

so that Harry had to grab his shoulders to stay on.

"Do you not see that unicorn?" Firenze bellowed at

Bane. "Do you not understand why it was killed? Or

have the planets not let you in on that secret? I set

myself against what is lurking in this forest, Bane,

yes, with humans alongside me if I must."

And Firenze whisked around; with Harry clutching on

as best he could, they plunged off into the trees,

leaving Ronan and Bane behind them.

Harry didn't have a clue what was going on.

"Why's Bane so angry?" he asked. "What was that

thing you saved me from, anyway?"

Firenze slowed to a walk, warned Harry to keep his

head bowed in case of low-hanging branches, but did

not answer Harry's question. They made their way

through the trees in silence for so long that Harry

thought Firenze didn't want to talk to him anymore.

They were passing through a particularly dense patch

of trees, however, when Firenze suddenly stopped.

"Harry Potter, do you know what unicorn blood is

used for?"

"No," said Harry, startled by the odd question. "We've

only used the horn and tail hair in Potions."

"That is because it is a monstrous thing, to slay a

unicorn," said Firenze. "Only one who has nothing to

lose, and everything to gain, would commit such a

crime. The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even

if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price.

You have slain something pure and defenseless to

save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a

cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your

lips."

Harry stared at the back of Firenze's head, which was

dappled silver in the moonlight.

"But who'd be that desperate?" he wondered aloud. "If

you're going to be cursed forever, death's better, isn't

it?"

"It is," Firenze agreed, "unless all you need is to stay

alive long enough to drink something else -

something that will bring you back to full strength

and power - something that will mean you can never

die. Mr. Potter, do you know what is hidden in the

school at this very moment?"

"The Sorcerer's Stone! Of course - the Elixir of Life!

But I don't understand who - "

"Can you think of nobody who has waited many years

to return to power, who has clung to life, awaiting

their chance?"

It was as though an iron fist had clenched suddenly

around Harry's heart. Over the rustling of the trees,

he seemed to hear once more what Hagrid had told

him on the night they had met: "Some say he died.

Codswallop, in my opinion. Dunno if he had enough

human left in him to die."

"Do you mean," Harry croaked, "that was VoZ - "

"Harry! Harry, are you all right?"

Hermione was running toward them down the path,

Hagrid puffing along behind her.

"I'm fine," said Harry, hardly knowing what he was

saying. "The unicorn's dead, Hagrid, it's in that

clearing back there."

"This is where I leave you," Firenze murmured as

Hagrid hurried off to examine the unicorn. "You are

safe now."

Harry slid off his back.

"Good luck, Harry Potter," said Firenze. "The planets

have been read wrongly before now, even by centaurs.

I hope this is one of those times."

He turned and cantered back into the depths of the

forest, leaving Harry shivering behind him.

Ron had fallen asleep in the dark common room,

waiting for them to return. He shouted something

about Quidditch fouls when Harry roughly shook him

awake. In a matter of seconds, though, he was wide-

eyed as Harry began to tell him and Hermione what

had happened in the forest.

Harry couldn't sit down. He paced up and down in

front of the fire. He was still shaking.

"Snape wants the Stone for Voldemort ... and

Voldemort's waiting in the forest ... and all this time

we thought Snape just wanted to get rich. ..."

"Stop saying the name!" said Ron in a terrified

whisper, as if he thought Voldemort could hear them.

Harry wasn't listening.

"Firenze saved me, but he shouldn't have done so. ...

Bane was furious ... he was talking about interfering

with what the planets say is going to happen. ... They

must show that Voldemort's coming back. ... Bane

thinks Firenze should have let Voldemort kill me. ... I

suppose that's written in the stars as well."

"Will you stop saying the name\" Ron hissed.

"So all I've got to wait for now is Snape to steal the

Stone," Harry went on feverishly, "then Voldemort will

be able to come and finish me off. ... Well, I suppose

Bane 11 be happy."

Hermione looked very frightened, but she had a word

of comfort.

"Harry, everyone says Dumbledore's the only one

You-Know-Who was ever afraid of. With Dumbledore

around, You-Know-Who won't touch you. Anyway,

who says the centaurs are right? It sounds like

fortune-telling to me, and Professor McGonagall says

that's a very imprecise branch of magic."

The sky had turned light before they stopped talking.

They went to bed exhausted, their throats sore. But

the night's surprises weren't over.

When Harry pulled back his sheets, he found his

Invisibility Cloak folded neatly underneath them.

There was a note pinned to it:

Just in case.

THROUGH THE TRAPDOOR

In years to come, Harry would never quite remember

how he had managed to get through his exams when

he half expected Voldemort to come bursting through

the door at any moment. Yet the days crept by, and

there could be no doubt that Fluffy was still alive and

well behind the locked door.

It was sweltering hot, especially in the large

classroom where they did their written papers. They

had been given special, new quills for the exams,

which had been bewitched with an Anti-Cheating

spell.

They had practical exams as well. Professor Flitwick

called them one by one into his class to see if they

could make a pineapple tap-dance across a desk.

Professor McGonagall watched them turn a mouse

into a snuffbox - points were given for how pretty the

snuffbox was, but taken away if it had whiskers.

Snape made them all nervous, breathing down their

necks while they tried to remember how to make a

Forgetfulness potion.

Harry did the best he could, trying to ignore the

stabbing pains in his forehead, which had been

bothering him ever since his trip into the forest.

Neville thought Harry had a bad case of exam nerves

because Harry couldn't sleep, but the truth was that

Harry kept being woken by his old nightmare, except

that it was now worse than ever because there was a

hooded figure dripping blood in it.

Maybe it was because they hadn't seen what Harry

had seen in the forest, or because they didn't have

scars burning on their foreheads, but Ron and

Hermione didn't seem as worried about the Stone as

Harry. The idea of Voldemort certainly scared them,

but he didn't keep visiting them in dreams, and they

were so busy with their studying they didn't have

much time to fret about what Snape or anyone else

might be up to.

Their very last exam was History of Magic. One hour

of answering questions about batty old wizards who'd

invented self-stirring cauldrons and they'd be free,

free for a whole wonderful week until their exam

results came out. When the ghost of Professor Binns

told them to put down their quills and roll up their

parchment, Harry couldn't help cheering with the

rest.

"That was far easier than I thought it would be," said

Hermione as they joined the crowds flocking out onto

the sunny grounds. "I needn't have learned about the

1637 Werewolf Code of Conduct or the uprising of

Elfric the Eager."

Hermione always liked to go through their exam

papers afterward, but Ron said this made him feel ill,

so they wandered down to the lake and flopped under

a tree. The Weasley twins and Lee Jordan were

tickling the tentacles of a giant squid, which was

basking in the warm shallows.

"No more studying," Ron sighed happily, stretching

out on the grass. "You could look more cheerful,

Harry, we've got a week before we find out how badly

we've done, there's no need to worry yet."

Harry was rubbing his forehead.

"I wish I knew what this means\" he burst out angrily.

"My scar keeps hurting - it's happened before, but

never as often as this."

"Go to Madam Pomfrey," Hermione suggested.

"I'm not ill," said Harry. "I think it's a warning ... it

means danger's coming. ..."

Ron couldn't get worked up, it was too hot.

"Harry, relax, Hermione 's right, the Stone's safe as

long as Dumbledore's around. Anyway, we've never

had any proof Snape found out how to get past Fluffy.

He nearly had his leg ripped off once, he's not going to

try it again in a hurry. And Neville will play Quidditch

for England before Hagrid lets Dumbledore down."

Harry nodded, but he couldn't shake off a lurking

feeling that there was something he'd forgotten to do,

something important. When he tried to explain this,

Hermione said, "That's just the exams. I woke up last

night and was halfway through my Transfiguration

notes before I remembered we'd done that one."

Harry was quite sure the unsettled feeling didn't have

anything to do with work, though. He watched an owl

flutter toward the school across the bright blue sky, a

note clamped in its mouth. Hagrid was the only one

who ever sent him letters. Hagrid would never betray

Dumbledore. Hagrid would never tell anyone how to

get past Fluffy . . . never . . . but -

Harry suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Where 're you going?" said Ron sleepily.

"I've just thought of something," said Harry. He had

turned white. "We've got to go and see Hagrid, now."

"Why?" panted Hermione, hurrying to keep up.

"Don't you think it's a bit odd," said Harry,

scrambling up the grassy slope, "that what Hagrid

wants more than anything else is a dragon, and a

stranger turns up who just happens to have an egg in

his pocket? How many people wander around with

dragon eggs if it's against wizard law? Lucky they

found Hagrid, don't you think? Why didn't I see it

before?"

"What are you talking about?" said Ron, but Harry,

sprinting across the grounds toward the forest, didn't

answer.

Hagrid was sitting in an armchair outside his house;

his trousers and sleeves were rolled up, and he was

shelling peas into a large bowl.

"Hullo," he said, smiling. "Finished yer exams? Got

time fer a drink?"

"Yes, please," said Ron, but Harry cut him off.

"No, we're in a hurry. Hagrid, I've got to ask you

something. You know that night you won Norbert?

What did the stranger you were playing cards with

look like?"

"Dunno said Hagrid casually, "he wouldn' take his

cloak off."

He saw the three of them look stunned and raised his

eyebrows.

"It's not that unusual, yeh get a lot o' funny folk in

the Hog's Head - that's one o' the pubs down in the

village. Mighta bin a dragon dealer, mightn' he? I

never saw his face, he kept his hood up."

Harry sank down next to the bowl of peas.

"What did you talk to him about, Hagrid? Did you

mention Hogwarts at all?"

"Mighta come up," said Hagrid, frowning as he tried

to remember. "Yeah ... he asked what I did, an' I told

him I was gamekeeper here. ... He asked a bit about

the sorta creatures I look after ... so I told him ... an' I

said what I'd always really wanted was a dragon ...

an' then ... I can' remember too well, 'cause he kept

buyin' me drinks. ... Let's see ... yeah, then he said he

had the dragon egg an' we could play cards fer it if I

wanted . . . but he had ter be sure I could handle it, he

didn' want it ter go ter any old home. ... So I told him,

after Fluffy, a dragon would be easy. ..."

"And did he - did he seem interested in Fluffy?"

Harry asked, trying to keep his voice calm.

"Well - yeah - how many three-headed dogs d'yeh

meet, even around Hogwarts? So I told him, Fluffy's a

piece o' cake if yeh know how to calm him down, jus'

play him a bit o' music an' he'll go straight off ter

sleep - "

Hagrid suddenly looked horrified.

"I shouldn'ta told yeh that!" he blurted out. "Forget I

said it! Hey - where're yeh goin'?"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione didn't speak to each other

at all until they came to a halt in the entrance hall,

which seemed very cold and gloomy after the

grounds.

"We've got to go to Dumbledore," said Harry. "Hagrid

told that stranger how to get past Fluffy, and it was

either Snape or Voldemort under that cloak - it

must've been easy, once he'd got Hagrid drunk. I just

hope Dumbledore believes us. Firenze might back us

up if Bane doesn't stop him. Where's Dumbledore's

office?"

They looked around, as if hoping to see a sign

pointing them in the right direction. They had never

been told where Dumbledore lived, nor did they know

anyone who had been sent to see him.

"Well just have to - " Harry began, but a voice

suddenly rang across the hall.

"What are you three doing inside?"

It was Professor McGonagall, carrying a large pile of

books.

"We want to see Professor Dumbledore," said

Hermione, rather bravely, Harry and Ron thought.

"See Professor Dumbledore?" Professor McGonagall

repeated, as though this was a very fishy thing to

want to do. "Why?"

Harry swallowed - now what?

"It's sort of secret," he said, but he wished at once he

hadn't, because Professor McGonagall's nostrils

flared.

"Professor Dumbledore left ten minutes ago," she said

coldly. "He received an urgent owl from the Ministry

of Magic and flew off for London at once."

"He's gone?" said Harry frantically. "Now?"

"Professor Dumbledore is a very great wizard, Potter,

he has many demands on his time - "

"But this is important."

"Something you have to say is more important than

the Ministry of Magic, Potter?"

"Look," said Harry, throwing caution to the winds,

"Professor - it's about the Sorcerer's Stone - "

Whatever Professor McGonagall had expected, it

wasn't that. The books she was carrying tumbled out

of her arms, but she didn't pick them up.

"How do you know - ?" she spluttered.

"Professor, I think - I know - that Sn - that

someone's going to try and steal the Stone. I've got to

talk to Professor Dumbledore."

She eyed him with a mixture of shock and suspicion.

"Professor Dumbledore will be back tomorrow," she

said finally. "I don't know how you found out about

the Stone, but rest assured, no one can possibly steal

it, it's too well protected."

"But Professor - "

"Potter, I know what I'm talking about," she said

shortly. She bent down and gathered up the fallen

books. "I suggest you all go back outside and enjoy

the sunshine."

But they didn't.

"It's tonight," said Harry, once he was sure Professor

McGonagall was out of earshot. "Snape's going

through the trapdoor tonight. He's found out

everything he needs, and now he's got Dumbledore

out of the way. He sent that note, I bet the Ministry of

Magic will get a real shock when Dumbledore turns

up."

"But what can we - "

Hermione gasped. Harry and Ron wheeled round.

Snape was standing there.

"Good afternoon," he said smoothly.

They stared at him.

"You shouldn't be inside on a day like this," he said,

with an odd, twisted smile.

"We were - " Harry began, without any idea what he

was going to say.

"You want to be more careful," said Snape. "Hanging

around like this, people will think you're up to

something. And Gryffindor really can't afford to lose

any more points, can it?"

Harry flushed. They turned to go outside, but Snape

called them back.

"Be warned, Potter - any more nighttime wanderings

and I will personally make sure you are expelled.

Good day to you."

He strode off in the direction of the staffroom.

Out on the stone steps, Harry turned to the others.

"Right, here's what we've got to do," he whispered

urgently. "One of us has got to keep an eye on Snape

- wait outside the staffroom and follow him if he

leaves it. Hermione, you'd better do that."

"Why me?"

"It's obvious," said Ron. "You can pretend to be

waiting for Professor Flitwick, you know." He put on a

high voice, " ‘Oh Professor Flitwick, I'm so worried, I

think I got question fourteen b wrong. . . . ' "

"Oh, shut up," said Hermione, but she agreed to go

and watch out for Snape.

"And we'd better stay outside the third-floor corridor,"

Harry told Ron. "Come on."

But that part of the plan didn't work. No sooner had

they reached the door separating Fluffy from the rest

of the school than Professor McGonagall turned up

again and this time, she lost her temper.

"I suppose you think you're harder to get past than a

pack of enchantments!" she stormed. "Enough of this

nonsense! If I hear you've come anywhere near here

again, I'll take another fifty points from Gryffindor!

Yes, Weasley, from my own House!"

Harry and Ron went back to the common room. Harry

had just said, "At least Hermione's on Snape's tail,"

when the portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and

Hermione came in.

"I'm sorry, Harry!" she wailed. "Snape came out and

asked me what I was doing, so I said I was waiting for

Flitwick, and Snape went to get him, and I've only

just got away, I don't know where Snape went."

"Well, that's it then, isn't it?" Harry said.

The other two stared at him. He was pale and his eyes

were glittering.

"I'm going out of here tonight and I'm going to try and

get to the Stone first."

"You're mad!" said Ron.

"You can't!" said Hermione. "After what McGonagall

and Snape have said? You'll be expelled!"

"SO WHAT?" Harry shouted. "Don't you understand?

If Snape gets hold of the Stone, Voldemort's coming

back! Haven't you heard what it was like when he was

trying to take over? There won't be any Hogwarts to

get expelled from! He'll flatten it, or turn it into a

school for the Dark Arts! Losing points doesn't matter

anymore, can't you see? D'you think he'll leave you

and your families alone if Gryffindor wins the House

Cup? If I get caught before I can get to the Stone, well,

I'll have to go back to the Dursleys and wait for

Voldemort to find me there, it's only dying a bit later

than I would have, because I'm never going over to

the Dark Side! I'm going through that trapdoor

tonight and nothing you two say is going to stop me!

Voldemort killed my parents, remember?"

He glared at them.

"You're right, Harry," said Hermione in a small voice.

"I'll use the Invisibility Cloak," said Harry. "It's just

lucky I got it back."

"But will it cover all three of us?" said Ron.

"All - all three of us?"

"Oh, come off it, you don't think we'd let you go

alone?"

"Of course not," said Hermione briskly. "How do you

think you'd get to the Stone without us? I'd better go

and look through my books, there might be

something useful. ..."

"But if we get caught, you two will be expelled, too."

"Not if I can help it," said Hermione grimly. "Flitwick

told me in secret that I got a hundred and twelve

percent on his exam. They're not throwing me out

after that."

After dinner the three of them sat nervously apart in

the common room. Nobody bothered them; none of

the Gryffindors had anything to say to Harry any

more, after all. This was the first night he hadn't been

upset by it. Hermione was skimming through all her

notes, hoping to come across one of the

enchantments they were about to try to break. Harry

and Ron didn't talk much. Both of them were

thinking about what they were about to do.

Slowly, the room emptied as people drifted off to bed.

"Better get the cloak," Ron muttered, as Lee Jordan

finally left, stretching and yawning. Harry ran

upstairs to their dark dormitory. He pulled out the

cloak and then his eyes fell on the flute Hagrid had

given him for Christmas. He pocketed it to use on

Fluffy - he didn't feel much like singing.

He ran back down to the common room.

"We'd better put the cloak on here, and make sure it

covers all three of us - if Filch spots one of our feet

wandering along on its own - "

"What are you doing?" said a voice from the corner of

the room. Neville appeared from behind an armchair,

clutching Trevor the toad, who looked as though he'd

been making another bid for freedom.

"Nothing, Neville, nothing," said Harry, hurriedly

putting the cloak behind his back.

Neville stared at their guilty faces.

"You're going out again," he said.

"No, no, no," said Hermione. "No, we're not. Why don't

you go to bed, Neville?"

Harry looked at the grandfather clock by the door.

They couldn't afford to waste any more time, Snape

might even now be playing Fluffy to sleep.

"You can't go out," said Neville, "you'll be caught

again. Gryffindor will be in even more trouble."

"You don't understand," said Harry, "this is

important."

But Neville was clearly steeling himself to do

something desperate.

"I won't let you do it," he said, hurrying to stand in

front of the portrait hole. "I'll - I'll fight you!"

"Neville," Ron exploded, "get away from that hole and

don't be an idiot - "

"Don't you call me an idiot!" said Neville. "I don't

think you should be breaking any more rules! And

you were the one who told me to stand up to people!"

"Yes, but not to us," said Ron in exasperation.

"Neville, you don't know what you're doing."

He took a step forward and Neville dropped Trevor the

toad, who leapt out of sight.

"Go on then, try and hit me!" said Neville, raising his

fists. "I'm ready!"

Harry turned to Hermione.

"Do something," he said desperately.

Hermione stepped forward.

"Neville," she said, "I'm really, really sorry about this."

She raised her wand.

"Petrificus Totalusl" she cried, pointing it at Neville.

Neville's arms snapped to his sides. His legs sprang

together. His whole body rigid, he swayed where he

stood and then fell flat on his face, stiff as a board.

Hermione ran to turn him over. Neville's jaws were

jammed together so he couldn't speak. Only his eyes

were moving, looking at them in horror.

"What've you done to him?" Harry whispered.

"It's the full Body-Bind," said Hermione miserably.

"Oh, Neville, I'm so sorry."

"We had to, Neville, no time to explain," said Harry.

"You'll understand later, Neville," said Ron as they

stepped over him and pulled on the Invisibility Cloak.

But leaving Neville lying motionless on the floor didn't

feel like a very good omen. In their nervous state,

every statue's shadow looked like Filch, every distant

breath of wind sounded like Peeves swooping down on

them.

At the foot of the first set of stairs, they spotted Mrs.

Norris skulking near the top.

"Oh, let's kick her, just this once," Ron whispered in

Harry's ear, but Harry shook his head. As they

climbed carefully around her, Mrs. Norris turned her

lamplike eyes on them, but didn't do anything.

They didn't meet anyone else until they reached the

staircase up to the third floor. Peeves was bobbing

halfway up, loosening the carpet so that people would

trip.

"Who's there?" he said suddenly as they climbed

toward him. He narrowed his wicked black eyes.

"Know you're there, even if I can't see you. Are you

ghoulie or ghostie or wee student beastie?"

He rose up in the air and floated there, squinting at

them.

"Should call Filch, I should, if something's a-creeping

around unseen."

Harry had a sudden idea.

"Peeves," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "the Bloody

Baron has his own reasons for being invisible."

Peeves almost fell out of the air in shock. He caught

himself in time and hovered about a foot off the

stairs.

"So sorry, your bloodiness, Mr. Baron, sir," he said

greasily. "My mistake, my mistake - I didn't see you

- of course I didn't, you're invisible - forgive old

Peevsie his little joke, sir."

"I have business here, Peeves," croaked Harry. "Stay

away from this place tonight."

"I will, sir, I most certainly will," said Peeves, rising up

in the air again. "Hope your business goes well,

Baron, I'll not bother you."

And he scooted off.

"Brilliant, Harry!" whispered Ron.

A few seconds later, they were there, outside the

third-floor corridor - and the door was already ajar.

"Well, there you are," Harry said quietly, "Snape's

already got past Fluffy."

Seeing the open door somehow seemed to impress

upon all three of them what was facing them.

Underneath the cloak, Harry turned to the other two.

"If you want to go back, I won't blame you," he said.

"You can take the cloak, I won't need it now."

"Don't be stupid," said Ron.

"We're coming," said Hermione.

Harry pushed the door open.

As the door creaked, low, rumbling growls met their

ears. All three of the dog's noses sniffed madly in their

direction, even though it couldn't see them.

"What's that at its feet?" Hermione whispered.

"Looks like a harp," said Ron. "Snape must have left it

there."

"It must wake up the moment you stop playing," said

Harry. "Well, here goes ..."

He put Hagrid's flute to his lips and blew. It wasn't

really a tune, but from the first note the beast's eyes

began to droop. Harry hardly drew breath. Slowly, the

dog's growls ceased - it tottered on its paws and fell

to its knees, then it slumped to the ground, fast

asleep.

"Keep playing," Ron warned Harry as they slipped out

of the cloak and crept toward the trapdoor. They

could feel the dog's hot, smelly breath as they

approached the giant heads.

"I think we'll be able to pull the door open," said Ron,

peering over the dog's back. "Want to go first,

Hermione?"

"No, I don't!"

"All right." Ron gritted his teeth and stepped carefully

over the dog's legs. He bent and pulled the ring of the

trapdoor, which swung up and open.

"What can you see?" Hermione said anxiously.

"Nothing - just black - there's no way of climbing

down, we'll just have to drop."

Harry, who was still playing the flute, waved at Ron to

get his attention and pointed at himself.

"You want to go first? Are you sure?" said Ron. "I

don't know how deep this thing goes. Give the flute to

Hermione so she can keep him asleep."

Harry handed the flute over. In the few seconds'

silence, the dog growled and twitched, but the

moment Hermione began to play, it fell back into its

deep sleep.

Harry climbed over it and looked down through the

trapdoor. There was no sign of the bottom.

He lowered himself through the hole until he was

hanging on by his fingertips. Then he looked up at

Ron and said, "If anything happens to me, don't

follow. Go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to

Dumbledore, right?"

"Right," said Ron.

"See you in a minute, I hope. ..."

And Harry let go. Cold, damp air rushed past him as

he fell down, down, down and -

FLUMP. With a funny, muffled sort of thump he

landed on something soft. He sat up and felt around,

his eyes not used to the gloom. It felt as though he

was sitting on some sort of plant.

"It's okay!" he called up to the light the size of a

postage stamp, which was the open trapdoor, "it's a

soft landing, you can jump!"

Ron followed right away. He landed, sprawled next to

Harry.

"What's this stuff?" were his first words.

"Dunno, some sort of plant thing. I suppose it's here

to break the fall. Come on, Hermione!"

The distant music stopped. There was a loud bark

from the dog, but Hermione had already jumped. She

landed on Harry's other side.

"We must be miles under the school," she said.

"Lucky this plant thing's here, really," said Ron.

"Lucky\" shrieked Hermione. "Look at you both!"

She leapt up and struggled toward a damp wall. She

had to struggle because the moment she had landed,

the plant had started to twist snakelike tendrils

around her ankles. As for Harry and Ron, their legs

had already been bound tightly in long creepers

without their noticing.

Hermione had managed to free herself before the

plant got a firm grip on her. Now she watched in

horror as the two boys fought to pull the plant off

them, but the more they strained against it, the

tighter and faster the plant wound around them.

"Stop moving!" Hermione ordered them. "I know what

this is - it's Devil's Snare!"

"Oh, I'm so glad we know what it's called, that's a

great help," snarled Ron, leaning back, trying to stop

the plant from curling around his neck.

"Shut up, I'm trying to remember how to kill it!" said

Hermione.

"Well, hurry up, I can't breathe!" Harry gasped,

wrestling with it as it curled around his chest.

"Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare ... what did Professor

Sprout say? - it likes the dark and the damp - "

"So light a fire!" Harry choked.

"Yes - of course - but there's no wood!" Hermione

cried, wringing her hands.

"HAVE YOU GONE MAD?" Ron bellowed. "ARE YOU A

WITCH OR NOT?"

"Oh, right!" said Hermione, and she whipped out her

wand, waved it, muttered something, and sent a jet of

the same bluebell flames she had used on Snape at

the plant. In a matter of seconds, the two boys felt it

loosening its grip as it cringed away from the light

and warmth. Wriggling and flailing, it unraveled itself

from their bodies, and they were able to pull free.

"Lucky you pay attention in Herbology, Hermione,"

said Harry as he joined her by the wall, wiping sweat

off his face.

"Yeah," said Ron, "and lucky Harry doesn't lose his

head in a crisis - ‘there's no wood,' honestly."

"This way," said Harry, pointing down a stone

passageway, which was the only way forward.

All they could hear apart from their footsteps was the

gentle drip of water trickling down the walls. The

passageway sloped downward, and Harry was

reminded of Gringotts. With an unpleasant jolt of the

heart, he remembered the dragons said to be

guarding vaults in the wizards' bank. If they met a

dragon, a fully-grown dragon - Norbert had been bad

enough ...

"Can you hear something?" Ron whispered.

Harry listened. A soft rustling and clinking seemed to

be coming from up ahead.

"Do you think it's a ghost?"

"I don't know ... sounds like wings to me."

"There's light ahead - I can see something moving."

They reached the end of the passageway and saw

before them a brilliantly lit chamber, its ceiling

arching high above them. It was full of small, jewel-

bright birds, fluttering and tumbling all around the

room. On the opposite side of the chamber was a

heavy wooden door.

"Do you think they'll attack us if we cross the room?"

said Ron.

"Probably," said Harry. "They don't look very vicious,

but I suppose if they all swooped down at once . . .

well, there's no other choice ... I'll run."

He took a deep breath, covered his face with his arms,

and sprinted across the room. He expected to feel

sharp beaks and claws tearing at him any second,

but nothing happened. He reached the door

untouched. He pulled the handle, but it was locked.

The other two followed him. They tugged and heaved

at the door, but it wouldn't budge, not even when

Hermione tried her Alohomora Charm.

"Now what?" said Ron.

"These birds ... they can't be here just for decoration,"

said Hermione.

They watched the birds soaring overhead, glittering -

glittering?

"They're not birds!" Harry said suddenly. "They're

keys\ Winged keys - look carefully. So that must

mean ..." he looked around the chamber while the

other two squinted up at the flock of keys. "... yes -

look! Broomsticks! We've got to catch the key to the

door!"

"But there are hundreds of them!"

Ron examined the lock on the door.

"We're looking for a big, old-fashioned one - probably

silver, like the handle."

They each seized a broomstick and kicked off into the

air, soaring into the midst of the cloud of keys. They

grabbed and snatched, but the bewitched keys darted

and dived so quickly it was almost impossible to

catch one.

Not for nothing, though, was Harry the youngest

Seeker in a century. He had a knack for spotting

things other people didn't. After a minute's weaving

about through the whirl of rainbow feathers, he

noticed a large silver key that had a bent wing, as if it

had already been caught and stuffed roughly into the

keyhole.

"That one!" he called to the others. "That big one -

there - no, there - with bright blue wings - the

feathers are all crumpled on one side."

Ron went speeding in the direction that Harry was

pointing, crashed into the ceiling, and nearly fell off

his broom.

"We've got to close in on it!" Harry called, not taking

his eyes off the key with the damaged wing. "Ron, you

come at it from above - Hermione, stay below and

stop it from going down - and I'll try and catch it.

Right, NOW!"

Ron dived, Hermione rocketed upward, the key

dodged them both, and Harry streaked after it; it sped

toward the wall, Harry leaned forward and with a

nasty, crunching noise, pinned it against the stone

with one hand. Ron and Hermione 's cheers echoed

around the high chamber.

They landed quickly, and Harry ran to the door, the

key struggling in his hand. He rammed it into the lock

and turned - it worked. The moment the lock had

clicked open, the key took flight again, looking very

battered now that it had been caught twice.

"Ready?" Harry asked the other two, his hand on the

door handle. They nodded. He pulled the door open.

The next chamber was so dark they couldn't see

anything at all. But as they stepped into it, light

suddenly flooded the room to reveal an astonishing

sight.

They were standing on the edge of a huge chessboard,

behind the black chessmen, which were all taller than

they were and carved from what looked like black

stone. Facing them, way across the chamber, were

the white pieces. Harry, Ron and Hermione shivered

slightly - the towering white chessmen had no faces.

"Now what do we do?" Harry whispered.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" said Ron. "We've got to play our

way across the room."

Behind the white pieces they could see another door.

"How?" said Hermione nervously.

"I think," said Ron, "we're going to have to be

chessmen."

He walked up to a black knight and put his hand out

to touch the knights horse. At once, the stone sprang

to life. The horse pawed the ground and the knight

turned his helmeted head to look down at Ron.

"Do we - er - have to join you to get across?"

The black knight nodded. Ron turned to the other

two.

"This needs thinking about. ..." he said. "I suppose

we've got to take the place of three of the black pieces.

Harry and Hermione stayed quiet, watching Ron

think. Finally he said, "Now, don't be offended or

anything, but neither of you are that good at chess -

"We're not offended," said Harry quickly. "Just tell us

what to do."

"Well, Harry, you take the place of that bishop, and

Hermione, you go there instead of that castle."

"What about you?"

"I'm going to be a knight," said Ron.

The chessmen seemed to have been listening, because

at these words a knight, a bishop, and a castle turned

their backs on the white pieces and walked off the

board, leaving three empty squares that Harry, Ron,

and Hermione took.

"White always plays first in chess," said Ron, peering

across the board. "Yes ... look ..."

A white pawn had moved forward two squares.

Ron started to direct the black pieces. They moved

silently wherever he sent them. Harry's knees were

trembling. What if they lost?

"Harry - move diagonally four squares to the right."

Their first real shock came when their other knight

was taken. The white queen smashed him to the floor

and dragged him off the board, where he lay quite

still, facedown.

"Had to let that happen," said Ron, looking shaken.

"Leaves you free to take that bishop, Hermione, go

on."

Every time one of their men was lost, the white pieces

showed no mercy. Soon there was a huddle of limp

black players slumped along the wall. Twice, Ron only

just noticed in time that Harry and Hermione were in

danger. He himself darted around the board, taking

almost as many white pieces as they had lost black

ones.

"We're nearly there," he muttered suddenly. "Let me

think - let me think ..."

The white queen turned her blank face toward him.

"Yes ..." said Ron softly, "it's the only way ... I've got

to be taken."

"NO!" Harry and Hermione shouted.

"That's chess!" snapped Ron. "You've got to make

some sacrifices! I make my move and she'll take me -

that leaves you free to checkmate the king, Harry!"

"But - "

"Do you want to stop Snape or not?"

"Ron - "

"Look, if you don't hurry up, hell already have the

Stone!"

There was no alternative.

"Ready?" Ron called, his face pale but determined.

"Here I go - now, don't hang around once you've

won."

He stepped forward, and the white queen pounced.

She struck Ron hard across the head with her stone

arm, and he crashed to the floor - Hermione

screamed but stayed on her square - the white

queen dragged Ron to one side. He looked as if he'd

been knocked out.

Shaking, Harry moved three spaces to the left.

The white king took off his crown and threw it at

Harry's feet. They had won. The chessmen parted and

bowed, leaving the door ahead clear. With one last

desperate look back at Ron, Harry and Hermione

charged through the door and up the next

passageway.

"What if he's - ?"

"He'll be all right," said Harry, trying to convince

himself. "What do you reckon's next?"

"We've had Sprout's, that was the Devil's Snare;

Flitwick must've put charms on the keys; McGonagall

transfigured the chessmen to make them alive; that

leaves Quirrell's spell, and Snape's ..."

They had reached another door.

"All right?" Harry whispered.

"Go on."

Harry pushed it open.

A disgusting smell filled their nostrils, making both of

them pull their robes up over their noses. Eyes

watering, they saw, flat on the floor in front of them, a

troll even larger than the one they had tackled, out

cold with a bloody lump on its head.

"I'm glad we didn't have to fight that one," Harry

whispered as they stepped carefully over one of its

massive legs. "Come on, I can't breathe."

He pulled open the next door, both of them hardly

daring to look at what came next - but there was

nothing very frightening in here, just a table with

seven differently shaped bottles standing on it in a

line.

"Snape's," said Harry. "What do we have to do?"

They stepped over the threshold, and immediately a

fire sprang up behind them in the doorway. It wasn't

ordinary fire either; it was purple. At the same

instant, black flames shot up in the doorway leading

onward. They were trapped.

"Look!" Hermione seized a roll of paper lying next to

the bottles. Harry looked over her shoulder to read it:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,

Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,

One among us seven will let you move ahead,

Another will transport the drinker back instead,

Two among our number hold only nettle wine,

Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.

Choose, unless you wish to stay here forevermore,

To help you in your choice, we give you these clues

four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide

You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;

Second, different are those who stand at either end,

But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;

Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,

Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;

Fourth, the second left and the second on the right

Are twins once you taste them, though different at first

sight

Hermione let out a great sigh and Harry, amazed, saw

that she was smiling, the very last thing he felt like

doing.

"Brilliant," said Hermione. "This isn't magic - it's

logic - a puzzle. A lot of the greatest wizards haven't

got an ounce of logic, they'd be stuck in here forever."

"But so will we, won't we?"

"Of course not," said Hermione. "Everything we need

is here on this paper. Seven bottles: three are poison;

two are wine; one will get us safely through the black

fire, and one will get us back through the purple."

"But how do we know which to drink?"

"Give me a minute."

Hermione read the paper several times. Then she

walked up and down the line of bottles, muttering to

herself and pointing at them. At last, she clapped her

hands.

"Got it," she said. "The smallest bottle will get us

through the black fire - toward the Stone."

Harry looked at the tiny bottle.

"There's only enough there for one of us," he said.

"That's hardly one swallow."

They looked at each other.

"Which one will get you back through the purple

flames?"

Hermione pointed at a rounded bottle at the right end

of the line.

"You drink that," said Harry. "No, listen, get back and

get Ron. Grab brooms from the flying-key room,

they'll get you out of the trapdoor and past Fluffy -

go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to

Dumbledore, we need him. I might be able to hold

Snape off for a while, but I'm no match for him,

really."

"But Harry - what if You-Know- Who's with him?"

"Well - I was lucky once, wasn't I?" said Harry,

pointing at his scar. "I might get lucky again."

Hermione's lip trembled, and she suddenly dashed at

Harry and threw her arms around him.

"Hermionel"

"Harry - you're a great wizard, you know."

"I'm not as good as you," said Harry, very

embarrassed, as she let go of him.

"Me!" said Hermione. "Books! And cleverness! There

are more important things - friendship and bravery

and - oh Harry - be carefull"

"You drink first," said Harry. "You are sure which is

which, aren't you?"

"Positive," said Hermione. She took a long drink from

the round bottle at the end, and shuddered.

"It's not poison?" said Harry anxiously.

"No - but it's like ice."

"Quick, go, before it wears off."

"Good luck - take care - "

"GO!"

Hermione turned and walked straight through the

purple fire.

Harry took a deep breath and picked up the smallest

bottle. He turned to face the black flames.

"Here I come," he said, and he drained the little bottle

in one gulp.

It was indeed as though ice was flooding his body. He

put the bottle down and walked forward; he braced

himself, saw the black flames licking his body, but

couldn't feel them - for a moment he could see

nothing but dark fire - then he was on the other

side, in the last chamber.

There was already someone there - but it wasn't

Snape. It wasn't even Voldemort.

THE MAN WITH TWO FACES

It was Quirrell.

"You\" gasped Harry.

Quirrell smiled. His face wasn't twitching at all.

"Me," he said calmly. "I wondered whether I'd be

meeting you here, Potter."

"But I thought - Snape - "

"Severus?" Quirrell laughed, and it wasn't his usual

quivering treble, either, but cold and sharp. "Yes,

Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to

have him swooping around like an overgrown bat.

Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor, st-

stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?"

Harry couldn't take it in. This couldn't be true, it

couldn't.

"But Snape tried to kill me!"

"No, no, no. / tried to kill you. Your friend Miss

Granger accidentally knocked me over as she rushed

to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She

broke my eye contact with you. Another few seconds

and I'd have got you off that broom. I'd have managed

it before then if Snape hadn't been muttering a

countercurse, trying to save you."

"Snape was trying to save me?"

"Of course," said Quirrell coolly. "Why do you think

he wanted to referee your next match? He was trying

to make sure I didn't do it again. Funny, really ... he

needn't have bothered. I couldn't do anything with

Dumbledore watching. All the other teachers thought

Snape was trying to stop Gryffindor from winning, he

did make himself unpopular . . . and what a waste of

time, when after all that, I'm going to kill you tonight."

Quirrell snapped his fingers. Ropes sprang out of thin

air and wrapped themselves tightly around Harry.

"You're too nosy to live, Potter. Scurrying around the

school on Halloween like that, for all I knew you'd

seen me coming to look at what was guarding the

Stone."

" You let the troll in?"

"Certainly. I have a special gift with trolls - you must

have seen what I did to the one in the chamber back

there? Unfortunately, while everyone else was

running around looking for it, Snape, who already

suspected me, went straight to the third floor to head

me off - and not only did my troll fail to beat you to

death, that three-headed dog didn't even manage to

bite Snape 's leg off properly.

"Now, wait quietly, Potter. I need to examine this

interesting mirror."

It was only then that Harry realized what was

standing behind Quirrell. It was the Mirror of Erised.

"This mirror is the key to finding the Stone," Quirrell

murmured, tapping his way around the frame. "Trust

Dumbledore to come up with something like this . . .

but he's in London ... I'll be far away by the time he

gets back. ..."

All Harry could think of doing was to keep Quirrell

talking and stop him from concentrating on the

mirror.

"I saw you and Snape in the forest - " he blurted out.

"Yes," said Quirrell idly, walking around the mirror to

look at the back. "He was on to me by that time,

trying to find out how far I'd got. He suspected me all

along. Tried to frighten me - as though he could,

when I had Lord Voldemort on my side. ..."

Quirrell came back out from behind the mirror and

stared hungrily into it.

"I see the Stone ... I'm presenting it to my master ...

but where is it?"

Harry struggled against the ropes binding him, but

they didn't give. He had to keep Quirrell from giving

his whole attention to the mirror.

"But Snape always seemed to hate me so much."

"Oh, he does," said Quirrell casually, "heavens, yes.

He was at Hogwarts with your father, didn't you

know? They loathed each other. But he never wanted

you dead."

"But I heard you a few days ago, sobbing - I thought

Snape was threatening you.

For the first time, a spasm of fear flitted across

Quirrell's face.

"Sometimes," he said, "I find it hard to follow my

master's instructions - he is a great wizard and I am

weak - "

"You mean he was there in the classroom with you?"

Harry gasped.

"He is with me wherever I go," said Quirrell quietly. "I

met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish

young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about

good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong

I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power,

and those too weak to seek it. ... Since then, I have

served him faithfully, although I have let him down

many times. He has had to be very hard on me."

Quirrell shivered suddenly. "He does not forgive

mistakes easily. When I failed to steal the Stone from

Gringotts, he was most displeased. He punished me

. . . decided he would have to keep a closer watch on

me. ..."

Quirrell's voice trailed away. Harry was remembering

his trip to Diagon Alley - how could he have been so

stupid? He'd seen Quirrell there that very day, shaken

hands with him in the Leaky Cauldron.

Quirrell cursed under his breath.

"I don't understand ... is the Stone inside the mirror?

Should I break it?"

Harry's mind was racing.

What I want more than anything else in the world at

the moment, he thought, is to find the Stone before

Quirrell does. So if I look in the mirror, I should see

my self finding it - which means I'll see where it's

hidden! But how can I look without Quirrell realizing

what I'm up to?

He tried to edge to the left, to get in front of the glass

without Quirrell noticing, but the ropes around his

ankles were too tight: he tripped and fell over. Quirrell

ignored him. He was still talking to himself.

"What does this mirror do? How does it work? Help

me, Master!"

And to Harry's horror, a voice answered, and the voice

seemed to come from Quirrell himself.

"Use the boy ... Use the boy ..."

Quirrell rounded on Harry.

"Yes - Potter - come here."

He clapped his hands once, and the ropes binding

Harry fell off. Harry got slowly to his feet.

"Come here," Quirrell repeated. "Look in the mirror

and tell me what you see."

Harry walked toward him.

I must lie, he thought desperately. I must look and lie

about what I see, that's all.

Quirrell moved close behind him. Harry breathed in

the funny smell that seemed to come from Quirrell's

turban. He closed his eyes, stepped in front of the

mirror, and opened them again.

He saw his reflection, pale and scared-looking at first.

But a moment later, the reflection smiled at him. It

put its hand into its pocket and pulled out a blood-

red stone. It winked and put the Stone back in its

pocket - and as it did so, Harry felt something heavy

drop into his real pocket. Somehow - incredibly -

he'd gotten the Stone.

"Well?" said Quirrell impatiently. "What do you see?"

Harry screwed up his courage.

"I see myself shaking hands with Dumbledore," he

invented. "I - I've won the House Cup for Gryffindor."

Quirrell cursed again.

"Get out of the way," he said. As Harry moved aside,

he felt the Sorcerer's Stone against his leg. Dare he

make a break for it?

But he hadn't walked five paces before a high voice

spoke, though Quirrell wasn't moving his lips.

"He lies ... He lies ..."

"Potter, come back here!" Quirrell shouted. "Tell me

the truth! What did you just see?"

The high voice spoke again.

"Let me speak to him ... face-to-face. ..."

"Master, you are not strong enough!"

"I have strength enough ... for this. ..."

Harry felt as if Devil's Snare was rooting him to the

spot. He couldn't move a muscle. Petrified, he

watched as Quirrell reached up and began to unwrap

his turban. What was going on? The turban fell away.

Quirrell's head looked strangely small without it.

Then he turned slowly on the spot.

Harry would have screamed, but he couldn't make a

sound. Where there should have been a back to

Quirrell's head, there was a face, the most terrible

face Harry had ever seen. It was chalk white with

glaring red eyes and slits for nostrils, like a snake.

"Harry Potter ..." it whispered.

Harry tried to take a step backward but his legs

wouldn't move.

"See what I have become?" the face said. "Mere

shadow and vapor ... I have form only when I can

share another's body . . . but there have always been

those willing to let me into their hearts and minds. ...

Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks

. . . you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the

forest ... and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be

able to create a body of my own. ... Now ... why don't

you give me that Stone in your pocket?"

So he knew. The feeling suddenly surged back into

Harry's legs. He stumbled backward.

"Don't be a fool," snarled the face. "Better save your

own life and join me ... or you'll meet the same end as

your parents. ... They died begging me for mercy. ..."

"LIAR!" Harry shouted suddenly.

Quirrell was walking backward at him, so that

Voldemort could still see him. The evil face was now

smiling.

"How touching ..." it hissed. "I always value bravery.

... Yes, boy, your parents were brave. ... I killed your

father first, and he put up a courageous fight . . . but

your mother needn't have died ... she was trying to

protect you. ... Now give me the Stone, unless you

want her to have died in vain."

"NEVER!"

Harry sprang toward the flame door, but Voldemort

screamed "SEIZE HIM!" and the next second, Harry

felt Quirrell's hand close on his wrist. At once, a

needle-sharp pain seared across Harry's scar; his

head felt as though it was about to split in two; he

yelled, struggling with all his might, and to his

surprise, Quirrell let go of him. The pain in his head

lessened - he looked around wildly to see where

Quirrell had gone, and saw him hunched in pain,

looking at his fingers - they were blistering before his

eyes.

"Seize him! SEIZE HIM!" shrieked Voldemort again,

and Quirrell lunged, knocking Harry clean off his feet,

landing on top of him, both hands around Harry's

neck - Harry's scar was almost blinding him with

pain, yet he could see Quirrell howling in agony.

"Master, I cannot hold him - my hands - my

hands!"

And Quirrell, though pinning Harry to the ground

with his knees, let go of his neck and stared,

bewildered, at his own palms - Harry could see they

looked burned, raw, red, and shiny.

"Then kill him, fool, and be done!" screeched

Voldemort.

Quirrell raised his hand to perform a deadly curse,

but Harry, by instinct, reached up and grabbed

Quirrell's face -

"AAAARGH!"

Quirrell rolled off him, his face blistering, too, and

then Harry knew: Quirrell couldn't touch his bare

skin, not without suffering terrible pain - his only

chance was to keep hold of Quirrell, keep him in

enough pain to stop him from doing a curse.

Harry jumped to his feet, caught Quirrell by the arm,

and hung on as tight as he could. Quirrell screamed

and tried to throw Harry off - the pain in Harry's

head was building - he couldn't see - he could only

hear Quirrell's terrible shrieks and Voldemort's yells

of, "KILL HIM! KILL HIM!" and other voices, maybe in

Harry's own head, crying, "Harry! Harry!"

He felt Quirrell's arm wrenched from his grasp, knew

all was lost, and fell into blackness, down ... down ...

down ...

Something gold was glinting just above him. The

Snitch! He tried to catch it, but his arms were too

heavy.

He blinked. It wasn't the Snitch at all. It was a pair of

glasses. How strange.

He blinked again. The smiling face of Albus

Dumbledore swam into view above him.

"Good afternoon, Harry," said Dumbledore.

Harry stared at him. Then he remembered: "Sir! The

Stone! It was Quirrell! He's got the Stone! Sir, quick -

"Calm yourself, dear boy, you are a little behind the

times," said Dumbledore. "Quirrell does not have the

Stone."

"Then who does? Sir, I - "

"Harry, please relax, or Madam Pomfrey will have me

thrown out."

Harry swallowed and looked around him. He realized

he must be in the hospital wing. He was lying in a bed

with white linen sheets, and next to him was a table

piled high with what looked like half the candy shop.

"Tokens from your friends and admirers," said

Dumbledore, beaming. "What happened down in the

dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a

complete secret, so, naturally, the whole school

knows. I believe your friends Misters Fred and George

Weasley were responsible for trying to send you a

toilet seat. No doubt they thought it would amuse

you. Madam Pomfrey, however, felt it might not be

very hygienic, and confiscated it."

"How long have I been in here?"

"Three days. Mr. Ronald Weasley and Miss Granger

will be most relieved you have come round, they have

been extremely worried."

"But sir, the Stone - "

"I see you are not to be distracted. Very well, the

Stone. Professor Quirrell did not manage to take it

from you. I arrived in time to prevent that, although

you were doing very well on your own, I must say."

"You got there? You got Hermione's owl?"

"We must have crossed in midair. No sooner had I

reached London than it became clear to me that the

place I should be was the one I had just left. I arrived

just in time to pull Quirrell off you - "

"It was you."

"I feared I might be too late."

"You nearly were, I couldn't have kept him off the

Stone much longer - "

"Not the Stone, boy, you - the effort involved nearly

killed you. For one terrible moment there, I was afraid

it had. As for the Stone, it has been destroyed."

"Destroyed?" said Harry blankly. "But your friend -

Nicolas Flamel - "

"Oh, you know about Nicolas?" said Dumbledore,

sounding quite delighted. "You did do the thing

properly, didn't you? Well, Nicolas and I have had a

little chat, and agreed it's all for the best."

"But that means he and his wife will die, won't they?"

"They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in

order and then, yes, they will die."

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on

Harry's face.

"To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible,

but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it really is like going to

bed after a very, very long day. After all, to the well-

organized mind, death is but the next great

adventure. You know, the Stone was really not such a

wonderful thing. As much money and life as you

could want! The two things most human beings would

choose above all - the trouble is, humans do have a

knack of choosing precisely those things that are

worst for them."

Harry lay there, lost for words. Dumbledore hummed

a little and smiled at the ceiling.

"Sir?" said Harry. "I've been thinking ... Sir - even if

the Stone's gone, Vol-, I mean, You-Know-Who - "

"Call him Voldemort, Harry. Always use the proper

name for things. Fear of a name increases fear of the

thing itself."

"Yes, sir. Well, Voldemort's going to try other ways of

coming back, isn't he? I mean, he hasn't gone, has

he?"

"No, Harry, he has not. He is still out there

somewhere, perhaps looking for another body to

share ... not being truly alive, he cannot be killed. He

left Quirrell to die; he shows just as little mercy to his

followers as his enemies. Nevertheless, Harry, while

you may only have delayed his return to power, it will

merely take someone else who is prepared to fight

what seems a losing battle next time - and if he is

delayed again, and again, why, he may never return

to power."

Harry nodded, but stopped quickly, because it made

his head hurt. Then he said, "Sir, there are some

other things I'd like to know, if you can tell me ...

things I want to know the truth about. ..."

"The truth." Dumbledore sighed. "It is a beautiful and

terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with

great caution. However, I shall answer your questions

unless I have a very good reason not to, in which case

I beg you 11 forgive me. I shall not, of course, lie."

"Well ... Voldemort said that he only killed my mother

because she tried to stop him from killing me. But

why would he want to kill me in the first place?"

Dumbledore sighed very deeply this time.

"Alas, the first thing you ask me, I cannot tell you.

Not today. Not now. You will know, one day ... put it

from your mind for now, Harry. When you are older . . .

I know you hate to hear this . . . when you are ready,

you will know."

And Harry knew it would be no good to argue.

"But why couldn't Quirrell touch me?"

"Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing

Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't

realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you

leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign ... to

have been loved so deeply, even though the person

who loved us is gone, will give us some protection

forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell, full of hatred,

greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort,

could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to

touch a person marked by something so good."

Dumbledore now became very interested in a bird out

on the windowsill, which gave Harry time to dry his

eyes on the sheet. When he had found his voice again,

Harry said, "And the Invisibility Cloak - do you know

who sent it to me?"

"Ah - your father happened to leave it in my

possession, and I thought you might like it."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled. "Useful things ... your

father used it mainly for sneaking off to the kitchens

to steal food when he was here."

"And there's something else ..."

"Fire away."

"Quirrell said Snape - "

"Professor Snape, Harry."

"Yes, him - Quirrell said he hates me because he

hated my father. Is that true?"

"Well, they did rather detest each other. Not unlike

yourself and Mr. Malfoy. And then, your father did

something Snape could never forgive."

"What?"

"He saved his life."

"What?"

"Yes ..." said Dumbledore dreamily. "Funny, the way

people's minds work, isn't it? Professor Snape

couldn't bear being in your father's debt. ... I do

believe he worked so hard to protect you this year

because he felt that would make him and your father

even. Then he could go back to hating your father's

memory in peace. ..."

Harry tried to understand this but it made his head

pound, so he stopped.

"And sir, there's one more thing ..."

"Just the one?"

"How did I get the Stone out of the mirror?"

"Ah, now, I'm glad you asked me that. It was one of

my more brilliant ideas, and between you and me,

that's saying something. You see, only one who

wanted to find the Stone - find it, but not use it -

would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see

themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life. My

brain surprises even me sometimes. ... Now, enough

questions. I suggest you make a start on these

sweets. Ah! Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans! I was

unfortunate enough in my youth to come across a

vomit-flavored one, and since then I'm afraid I've

rather lost my liking for them - but I think I'll be safe

with a nice toffee, don't you?"

He smiled and popped the golden-brown bean into his

mouth. Then he choked and said, "Alas! Ear wax!"

Madam Pomfrey, the nurse, was a nice woman, but

very strict.

"Just five minutes," Harry pleaded.

"Absolutely not."

"You let Professor Dumbledore in. ..."

"Well, of course, that was the headmaster, quite

different. You need rest."

"I am resting, look, lying down and everything. Oh, go

on, Madam Pomfrey ..."

"Oh, very well," she said. "But five minutes only."

And she let Ron and Hermione in.

"Harryl"

Hermione looked ready to fling her arms around him

again, but Harry was glad she held herself in as his

head was still very sore.

"Oh, Harry, we were sure you were going to -

Dumbledore was so worried - "

"The whole school's talking about it," said Ron. "What

really happened?"

It was one of those rare occasions when the true story

is even more strange and exciting than the wild

rumors. Harry told them everything: Quirrell; the

mirror; the Stone; and Voldemort. Ron and Hermione

were a very good audience; they gasped in all the

right places, and when Harry told them what was

under Quirrell's turban, Hermione screamed out loud.

"So the Stone's gone?" said Ron finally. "Flamel's just

going to die?"

"That's what I said, but Dumbledore thinks that -

what was it? - ‘to the well-organized mind, death is

but the next great adventure.' "

"I always said he was off his rocker," said Ron,

looking quite impressed at how crazy his hero was.

"So what happened to you two?" said Harry.

"Well, I got back all right," said Hermione. "I brought

Ron round - that took a while - and we were

dashing up to the owlery to contact Dumbledore when

we met him in the entrance hall - he already knew -

he just said, ‘Harry's gone after him, hasn't he?' and

hurtled off to the third floor."

"D'you think he meant you to do it?" said Ron.

"Sending you your fathers cloak and everything?"

"Well," Hermione exploded, "if he did - I mean to say

- that's terrible - you could have been killed."

"No, it isn't," said Harry thoughtfully. "He's a funny

man, Dumbledore. I think he sort of wanted to give

me a chance. I think he knows more or less

everything that goes on here, you know. I reckon he

had a pretty good idea we were going to try, and

instead of stopping us, he just taught us enough to

help. I don't think it was an accident he let me find

out how the mirror worked. It's almost like he thought

I had the right to face Voldemort if I could. ..."

"Yeah, Dumbledore's off his rocker, all right," said

Ron proudly. "Listen, you've got to be up for the end-

of-year feast tomorrow. The points are all in and

Slytherin won, of course - you missed the last

Quidditch match, we were steamrollered by

Ravenclaw without you - but the food'll be good."

At that moment, Madam Pomfrey bustled over.

"You've had nearly fifteen minutes, now OUT," she

said firmly.

•k k k

After a good night's sleep, Harry felt nearly back to

normal.

"I want to go to the feast," he told Madam Pomfrey as

she straightened his many candy boxes. "I can, can't

I?"

"Professor Dumbledore says you are to be allowed to

go," she said sniffily, as though in her opinion

Professor Dumbledore didn't realize how risky feasts

could be. "And you have another visitor."

"Oh, good," said Harry. "Who is it?"

Hagrid sidled through the door as he spoke. As usual

when he was indoors, Hagrid looked too big to be

allowed. He sat down next to Harry, took one look at

him, and burst into tears.

"It's - all - my - ruddy - fault!" he sobbed, his

face in his hands. "I told the evil git how ter get past

Fluffy! I told him! It was the only thing he didn't

know, an' I told him! Yeh could've died! All fer a

dragon egg! I'll never drink again! I should be chucked

out an' made ter live as a Muggle!"

"Hagrid!" said Harry, shocked to see Hagrid shaking

with grief and remorse, great tears leaking down into

his beard. "Hagrid, he'd have found out somehow,

this is Voldemort we're talking about, he'd have found

out even if you hadn't told him."

"Yeh could've died!" sobbed Hagrid. "An' don' say the

name!"

"VOLDEMORT!" Harry bellowed, and Hagrid was so

shocked, he stopped crying. "I've met him and I'm

calling him by his name. Please cheer up, Hagrid, we

saved the Stone, it's gone, he can't use it. Have a

Chocolate Frog, I've got loads. ..."

Hagrid wiped his nose on the back of his hand and

said, "That reminds me. I've got yeh a present."

"It's not a stoat sandwich, is it?" said Harry

anxiously, and at last Hagrid gave a weak chuckle.

"Nah. Dumbledore gave me the day off yesterday ter

fix it. 'Course, he shoulda sacked me instead -

anyway, got y eh this ..."

It seemed to be a handsome, leather-covered book.

Harry opened it curiously. It was full of wizard

photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every

page were his mother and father.

"Sent owls off ter all yer parents' old school friends,

askin' fer photos ... knew yeh didn' have any ... d'yeh

like it?"

Harry couldn't speak, but Hagrid understood.

Harry made his way down to the end-of-year feast

alone that night. He had been held up by Madam

Pomfrey's fussing about, insisting on giving him one

last checkup, so the Great Hall was already full. It

was decked out in the Slytherin colors of green and

silver to celebrate Slytherin 's winning the House Cup

for the seventh year in a row. A huge banner showing

the Slytherin serpent covered the wall behind the

High Table.

When Harry walked in there was a sudden hush, and

then everybody started talking loudly at once. He

slipped into a seat between Ron and Hermione at the

Gryffindor table and tried to ignore the fact that

people were standing up to look at him.

Fortunately, Dumbledore arrived moments later. The

babble died away.

"Another year gone!" Dumbledore said cheerfully.

"And I must trouble you with an old man's wheezing

waffle before we sink our teeth into our delicious

feast. What a year it has been! Hopefully your heads

are all a little fuller than they were . . . you have the

whole summer ahead to get them nice and empty

before next year starts. ...

"Now, as I understand it, the House Cup here needs

awarding, and the points stand thus: In fourth place,

Gryffindor, with three hundred and twelve points; in

third, Hufflepuff, with three hundred and fifty-two;

Ravenclaw has four hundred and twenty-six and

Slytherin, four hundred and seventy- two."

A storm of cheering and stamping broke out from the

Slytherin table. Harry could see Draco Malfoy banging

his goblet on the table. It was a sickening sight.

"Yes, yes, well done, Slytherin," said Dumbledore.

"However, recent events must be taken into account."

The room went very still. The Slytherins' smiles faded

a little.

"Ahem," said Dumbledore. "I have a few last-minute

points to dish out. Let me see. Yes ...

"First - to Mr. Ronald Weasley ..."

Ron went purple in the face; he looked like a radish

with a bad sunburn.

"... for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has

seen in many years, I award Gryffindor House fifty

points."

Gryffindor cheers nearly raised the bewitched ceiling;

the stars overhead seemed to quiver. Percy could be

heard telling the other prefects, "My brother, you

know! My youngest brother! Got past McGonagall's

giant chess set!"

At last there was silence again.

"Second - to Miss Hermione Granger . . . for the use of

cool logic in the face of fire, I award Gryffindor House

fifty points."

Hermione buried her face in her arms; Harry strongly

suspected she had burst into tears. Gryffindors up

and down the table were beside themselves - they

were a hundred points up.

"Third - to Mr. Harry Potter ..." said Dumbledore.

The room went deadly quiet. "... for pure nerve and

outstanding courage, I award Gryffindor House sixty

points."

The din was deafening. Those who could add up while

yelling themselves hoarse knew that Gryffindor now

had four hundred and seventy-two points - exactly

the same as Slytherin. They had tied for the House

Cup - if only Dumbledore had given Harry just one

more point.

Dumbledore raised his hand. The room gradually fell

silent.

"There are all kinds of courage," said Dumbledore,

smiling. "It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up

to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our

friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville

Longbottom."

Someone standing outside the Great Hall might well

have thought some sort of explosion had taken place,

so loud was the noise that erupted from the

Gryffindor table. Harry, Ron, and Hermione stood up

to yell and cheer as Neville, white with shock,

disappeared under a pile of people hugging him. He

had never won so much as a point for Gryffindor

before. Harry, still cheering, nudged Ron in the ribs

and pointed at Malfoy, who couldn't have looked more

stunned and horrified if he'd just had the Body-Bind

Curse put on him.

"Which means," Dumbledore called over the storm of

applause, for even Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff were

celebrating the downfall of Slytherin, "we need a little

change of decoration."

He clapped his hands. In an instant, the green

hangings became scarlet and the silver became gold;

the huge Slytherin serpent vanished and a towering

Gryffindor lion took its place. Snape was shaking

Professor McGonagall's hand, with a horrible, forced

smile. He caught Harry's eye and Harry knew at once

that Snape 's feelings toward him hadn't changed one

jot. This didn't worry Harry. It seemed as though life

would be back to normal next year, or as normal as it

ever was at Hogwarts.

It was the best evening of Harry's life, better than

winning at Quidditch, or Christmas, or knocking out

mountain trolls ... he would never, ever forget tonight.

Harry had almost forgotten that the exam results

were still to come, but come they did. To their great

surprise, both he and Ron passed with good marks;

Hermione, of course, had the best grades of the first

years. Even Neville scraped through, his good

Herbology mark making up for his abysmal Potions

one. They had hoped that Goyle, who was almost as

stupid as he was mean, might be thrown out, but he

had passed, too. It was a shame, but as Ron said, you

couldn't have everything in life.

And suddenly, their wardrobes were empty, their

trunks were packed, Neville's toad was found lurking

in a corner of the toilets; notes were handed out to all

students, warning them not to use magic over the

holidays ("I always hope they'll forget to give us

these," said Fred Weasley sadly); Hagrid was there to

take them down to the fleet of boats that sailed across

the lake; they were boarding the Hogwarts Express;

talking and laughing as the countryside became

greener and tidier; eating Bertie Bott's Every Flavor

Beans as they sped past Muggle towns; pulling off

their wizard robes and putting on jackets and coats;

pulling into platform nine and three-quarters at

King's Cross station.

It took quite a while for them all to get off the

platform. A wizened old guard was up by the ticket

barrier, letting them go through the gate in twos and

threes so they didn't attract attention by all bursting

out of a solid wall at once and alarming the Muggles.

"You must come and stay this summer," said Ron,

"both of you - I'll send you an owl."

"Thanks," said Harry, "I'll need something to look

forward to."

People jostled them as they moved forward toward the

gateway back to the Muggle world. Some of them

called:

"Bye, Harry!"

"See you, Potter!"

"Still famous," said Ron, grinning at him.

"Not where I'm going, I promise you," said Harry.

He, Ron, and Hermione passed through the gateway

together.

"There he is, Mom, there he is, look!"

It was Ginny Weasley, Ron's younger sister, but she

wasn't pointing at Ron.

"Harry Potter!" she squealed. "Look, Mom! I can see

"Be quiet, Ginny, and it's rude to point."

Mrs. Weasley smiled down at them.

"Busy year?" she said.

"Very," said Harry. "Thanks for the fudge and the

sweater, Mrs. Weasley."

"Oh, it was nothing, dear."

"Ready, are you?"

It was Uncle Vernon, still purple-faced, still

mustached, still looking furious at the nerve of Harry,

carrying an owl in a cage in a station full of ordinary

people. Behind him stood Aunt Petunia and Dudley,

looking terrified at the very sight of Harry.

"You must be Harry's family!" said Mrs. Weasley.

"In a manner of speaking," said Uncle Vernon. "Hurry

up, boy, we haven't got all day." He walked away.

Harry hung back for a last word with Ron and

Hermione.

"See you over the summer, then."

"Hope you have - er - a good holiday," said

Hermione, looking uncertainly after Uncle Vernon,

shocked that anyone could be so unpleasant.

"Oh, I will," said Harry, and they were surprised at

the grin that was spreading over his face. " They don't

know we're not allowed to use magic at home. I'm

going to have a lot of fun with Dudley this summer..."