

3. Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

The summer before his third year, Harry loses his temper and accidentally inflates his odious Aunt Marge. Fearing expulsion, he runs away and is picked up by the Knight Bus, a triple-decker magical bus for stranded witches and wizards. He is taken to the Leaky Cauldron, where he is met by the Minister for Magic, Cornelius Fudge, who surprisingly pardons him. Here, he reunites with Ron and Hermione and learns that a notorious murderer, Sirius Black, has escaped from the wizard prison, Azkaban. Black was a devoted follower of Lord Voldemort and is believed to be responsible for betraying Harry's parents and murdering their friend, Peter Pettigrew, along with twelve Muggles. The wizarding world believes Black is now hunting Harry.

As a result, Azkaban's guards, the Dementors, are stationed around Hogwarts. These terrifying, cloaked creatures feed on happiness, and their presence has a uniquely debilitating effect on Harry, causing him to hear his mother's screams and pass out. On the Hogwarts Express, a Dementor enters their compartment, and Harry faints. He is revived by the new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Remus Lupin, a kind and competent man who quickly becomes a mentor to Harry. Recognizing Harry's vulnerability to the Dementors, Lupin agrees to teach him an advanced spell to combat them: the Patronus Charm.

During the school year, Sirius Black manages to infiltrate Hogwarts Castle on two occasions, further heightening security and fear. Meanwhile, Harry receives an anonymous Christmas gift: a Firebolt, the fastest racing broom in the world. Hermione, fearing it is cursed and sent by Black, reports it to Professor McGonagall, causing a temporary rift in their friendship. Harry also receives the Marauder's Map from Fred and George Weasley, a magical map that shows the location of everyone at Hogwarts in real-time. The map was created by four mysterious individuals known as "Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs." Using the map, Harry discovers a secret passage to the nearby wizarding village of Hogsmeade, which he was forbidden to visit. There, he overhears that Sirius Black was not only his parents' best friend but is also his godfather.

The climax of the story occurs after Hagrid's beloved Hippogriff, Buckbeak, is sentenced to death for injuring Draco Malfoy. As Harry, Ron, and Hermione leave Hagrid's hut after the apparent execution, Ron's pet rat, Scabbers, bites him and escapes. Ron chases him to the Whomping Willow, where a large black dog appears, drags both Ron and Scabbers into a tunnel beneath the tree. Harry and Hermione follow, discovering the tunnel leads to the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade.

Inside, the black dog transforms into Sirius Black. He is an Animagus—a wizard who can turn into an animal at will. Professor Lupin arrives, disarms the trio, and embraces Black as an old friend. He reveals that he is also one of the map's creators ("Moony") and that he is a werewolf. The true traitor to the Potters was not Sirius, but Peter Pettigrew ("Wormtail"), another of their friends. Pettigrew, also an Animagus who can turn into a rat, framed Sirius for his own crimes, faked his death, and has been hiding in his rat form for twelve years—as the Weasleys' pet, Scabbers.

Sirius and Lupin force Pettigrew to transform back into his human form. They are about to kill him when Harry intervenes, insisting they turn him over to the authorities to prove Sirius's innocence. As they lead Pettigrew back to the castle, the full moon rises, and Lupin transforms into a dangerous werewolf. In the ensuing chaos, Pettigrew escapes. Sirius transforms into his dog form to protect the children from Lupin, but is injured. At the edge of the Black Lake, Dementors descend upon them, and Harry's attempt at a Patronus is too weak. As a Dementor is about to perform its soul-sucking "Kiss" on Sirius, a powerful, corporeal Patronus in the form of a stag appears across the lake and drives them away.

Harry awakens in the hospital wing to find that Sirius has been captured and is to be given the Dementor's Kiss. Dumbledore arrives and, believing Harry's story, gives Hermione a cryptic instruction to use her Time-Turner—a device she has been using all year to attend multiple classes at once—to go back and save more than one innocent life. Harry and Hermione travel back in time three hours. They witness the events of the evening again, with Harry realizing that the powerful Patronus he saw was not cast by his father, but by his future self. They successfully rescue Buckbeak from execution and then fly him up to the tower where Sirius is being held, allowing him to escape. Sirius flies away on Buckbeak, a free man, though still a fugitive. Lupin, his identity as a werewolf now exposed, resigns from his teaching post.