

— CHAPTER ONE —

The Boy Who Lived

Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mr Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. 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 neighbours. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs Potter was Mrs Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbours 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, grey Tuesday our story starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be hap-

pening all over the country. Mr Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work and Mrs Dursley gossiped away

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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 goodbye 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 realise 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 towards 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 get-ups 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 car park, 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

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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 night-time. 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 lunch-time, when he thought he'd stretch his legs and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the baker's opposite.

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 lot 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 dialling his home number when he changed his mind. He put the receiver back down and stroked his moustache, 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 realised 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

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a wide smile and he said in a squeaky voice that made passers-by 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 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 behaviour, 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 learnt a new word ('Shan'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 news reader 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

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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 lot*.'

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 was 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

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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 in 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 in 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 which 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 realise 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 realise 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 had 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 in 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

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his cloak and set off down the street towards 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 rumours.’

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 sherbet lemon?’

‘A *what?*’

‘A sherbet lemon. They’re a kind of Muggle sweet I’m rather fond of.’

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‘No, thank you,’ said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn’t think this was the moment for sherbet lemons. ‘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 sherbet lemons, 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 to the *rumours* 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 sherbet lemon 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 rumour 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

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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 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

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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 motorbike fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorbike 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 dustbin 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 motorbike?'

‘Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir,’ said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorbike as he spoke. ‘Young Sirius Black lent it 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

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curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

‘Is that where –?’ whispered Professor McGonagall.

‘Yes,’ said Dumbledore. ‘He’ll have that scar for ever.’

‘Couldn’t you do something about it, Dumbledore?’

‘Even if I could, I wouldn’t. Scars can come in useful. I have

one myself above my left knee which 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 towards the Dursleys’ house.

‘Could I – could I say goodbye 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 on to the motorbike 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

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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!’

— CHAPTER TWO —

The Vanishing Glass

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass number four on the Dursleys’ front door; it crept into their living-room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed. Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beach ball wearing different-coloured bobble hats – but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large, blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a roundabout 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 which 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 towards the

kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the cooker. He rolled on to his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one. There had been a flying motorbike 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

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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 got 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 favourite punch-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 Sellotape 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 which 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 got 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

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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 Mummy 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 cine-camera, a remote-control aeroplane, sixteen new computer games and a video recorder. 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

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leap. Every year on Dudley’s birthday his parents took him and a friend out for the day, to adventure parks, hamburger bars or the cinema. 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 holiday in Majorca,’ snapped Aunt Petunia.

‘You could just leave me here,’ Harry put in hopefully (he’d be

able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer).

Aunt Petunia looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon. 'And come back and find the house in ruins?' she snarled.

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

'I suppose we could take him to the zoo,' said Aunt Petunia

slowly, '... and leave him in the car ...'

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

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

had been years since he'd really cried, but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted.

'Dinky Duddydums, don't cry, Mummy won't let him spoil your special day!' she cried, flinging her arms around him.

'I ... don't ... want ... him ... t-t-to come!' Dudley yelled between huge pretend sobs. 'He always sp-spoils everything!' He shot Harry a nasty grin through the gap in his mother's arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang – 'Oh, Good Lord, they're here!' said Aunt Petunia frantically – and a moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat. He was usually the one who

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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 barber's 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 fringe, 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 Sellotaped glasses. Next morning, however, he had got 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 jumper of Dudley's (brown with orange bobbles). The harder she tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until finally it might have fitted a glove 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 got 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

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(as he shouted at Uncle Vernon through the locked door of his cupboard) was jump behind the big bins 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 favourite subjects. This morning, it was motorbikes.

'... roaring along like maniacs, the young hoodlums,' he said, as a motorbike overtook them.

'I had a dream about a motorbike,' 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 beetroot with a moustache, 'MOTORBIKES DON'T FLY!'

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

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

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

the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon – they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice-creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in

the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap lemon ice lolly. It wasn't bad either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head and looking 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 lunch-time, wouldn't fall back on their favourite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory wasn't big enough,

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Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterwards, 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 here, 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 dustbin – 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 towards 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.

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

Boa Constrictor, Brazil.

‘Was it nice there?’

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on: *This specimen was bred in the zoo.* 'Oh, I see – so you've never been to Brazil?'

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Harry made both of them jump. 'DUDLEY! MR DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T *BELIEVE* WHAT IT'S DOING!'

Dudley came waddling towards 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 on to 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 apologised 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.

*

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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.

— CHAPTER THREE —

The Letters from No One

The escape of the Brazilian boa constrictor earned Harry his longest-ever punishment. By the time he was allowed out of his cupboard again, the summer holidays had started and Dudley had already broken his new cine-camera, crashed his remote-control aeroplane and, first time 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 favourite 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 a place at Uncle Vernon's old school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there, too. Harry, on the other hand, was going to Stonewall High, the local comprehensive. Dudley thought this was very funny.

'They stuff people's heads down the toilet first day at Stonewall,' he told Harry. 'Want to come upstairs and practise?'

‘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

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chocolate cake that tasted as though she’d had it for several years. That evening, Dudley paraded around the living-room for the family in his brand-new uniform. Smeltings boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren’t looking. This was supposed to be good training

for later life.

As he looked at Dudley in his new knickerbockers, Uncle

Vernon said gruffly that it was the proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she couldn’t believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up. Harry didn’t trust himself to speak. He thought two of his ribs might already have cracked from trying not to laugh.

There was a horrible smell in the kitchen 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 grey 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 realise it had to be so wet.’

‘Don’t be stupid,’ snapped Aunt Petunia. ‘I’m dyeing some of

Dudley’s old things grey 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 Smeltings stick, which he carried everywhere, on the table.

They heard the click of the letter-box and flop of letters on the doormat.

‘Get the post, Dudley,’ said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

‘Make Harry get it.’ ‘Get the post, Harry.’ ‘Make Dudley get it.’

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‘Poke him with your Smeltings stick, Dudley.’

Harry dodged the Smeltings stick and went to get the post. Three things lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon’s sister Marge, who was holidaying 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 writ-

ten 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

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red to green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn't stop there. Within seconds it was the greyish 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 Smeltings 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?’

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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 cine-camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over next door’s dog; in the corner was Dudley’s first-ever television set, which he’d put his foot through when his favourite programme had been cancelled; there was a large bird-cage 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

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in shock. He’d screamed, whacked his father with his Smeltings 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 post 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 Smeltings 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 Smeltings 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 towards 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 realised 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

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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 post 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 letter-box.

'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 people's 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 fruit cake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

*

On Friday, no fewer than twelve letters arrived for Harry. As they couldn't go through the letter-box they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides and a few even forced through the small window in the downstairs toilet.

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 mixer.

'Who on earth wants to talk to *you* this badly?' Dudley asked Harry in amazement.

*

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 happily as he spread

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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 moustache 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 moustache 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 towards the motorway. Dudley was sniffing in the back seat; his father had hit him round the head for holding them up while he tried to pack his television, video 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 turning 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 programmes 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 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 17 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.

*

‘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 ploughed field, halfway across a suspension bridge and at the top of a multi-storey car park.

‘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 snivelled.

‘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

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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 to 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 rowing boat bobbing in the iron-grey 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 fire- place was damp and empty. There were only two rooms.

Uncle Vernon's rations turned out to be a packet of crisps each and four bananas. He tried to start a fire but the empty crisp packets just smoked and shrivelled up.

'Could do with some of those letters now, eh?' he said cheer- fully.

He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a storm to deliver post. 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 mouldy 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

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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.

— CHAPTER FOUR —

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 skid-

ding 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 mum’s eyes.’

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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 shrivelled crisp packets 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 which 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' any more, 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 learnt 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 maths 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 mum and dad,’ he said. ‘I mean,

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they’re *famous*. *You’re* famous.’

‘What? My – my mum 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 OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

*Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore
(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock, Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)*

*Dear Mr Potter,
We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find*

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*enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.
Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later
than 31 July.*

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?'

'Gallop in' 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 which Harry could read upside-down:

*Dear Mr 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 realised 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 non-magic 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 holiday 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’t 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.'

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'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 Hallowe’en 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’

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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 comin' back.

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'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 – I 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 hair-cut, 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 realising 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

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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 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.’

— CHAPTER FIVE —

Diagon Alley

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 on to 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, mint humbugs, tea-bags ... finally, Harry pulled out a handful of strange-looking coins.

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‘Give him five Knuts,’ said Hagrid sleepily.

‘Knuts?’

‘The little bronze ones.’

Harry counted out five little bronze coins and the owl held out

its leg so he could put the money into a small leather pouch tied to it. Then it 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 which made him feel as though the happy balloon inside him had got a puncture.

‘Um – 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 scratch-

ing 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 on to 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.

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'Flew,' said Hagrid.

'Flew?'

'Yeah – but we'll go back in this. Not s'posed 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 towards 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 learnt 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 harbour wall. Hagrid folded up his newspaper and they clambered up the stone steps on to the street.

Passers-by 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 notes 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 OF 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

Set 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 Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration by Emeric Switch One

Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore Magical

Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

DIAGON ALLEY 53 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 which 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 bars 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 humour, 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

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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 barman, who was quite bald and looked like a gummy walnut. The low buzz of chatter stopped when they

walked in. Everyone seemed to know Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the barman 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 barman, peering at Harry, 'is this – can this be –?'

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

'Bless my soul,' whispered the old barman. 'Harry Potter ... what an honour.'

He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed towards 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 realising it had gone out. Hagrid was beaming.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and, 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.'

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‘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-Defence 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 dustbin 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 first-hand 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 dustbin.

‘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,

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a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway on to a cobbled street which 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's 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 which 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 towards 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,

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*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 on 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 on to the counter, scattering a handful of mouldy dog-biscuits over the goblin’s 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 towards 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.’

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Griphook held the door open for them. Harry, who had expected more marble, was surprised. They were in a narrow stone passage- way lit with flaming torches. It sloped steeply downwards and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks towards 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 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 for 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.

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They went rattling over an underground ravine and Harry leant over the side to try and 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 leant 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 towards *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.

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'Hullo,' 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'll 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 towards 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 in 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

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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 colour 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 ‘em in the Leaky Cauldron. 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 football 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's, 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's, Hagrid checked Harry's list again.

‘Just yer wand left – oh yeah, an’ I still haven’t got yeh a birth- day 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 post an’ everythin’.’

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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 which 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 382 BC*. 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 which Hagrid sat on to wait. Harry felt strangely as though he had entered a very strict library; he swallowed a lot of new questions which 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, favoured a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favoured it – it’s really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course.’

Mr Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were

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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 realised 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. Beechwood 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

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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, we'll 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.

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The late-afternoon sun hung low in the sky as Harry and Hagrid made their way back down Diagon Alley, back through the wall,

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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 gawping at them on the Underground, laden as they were with all their funny-shaped packages, with the sleeping snowy owl on Harry’s lap. Up another escalator, out into Paddington station; Harry only realised 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 leant 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.