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“But why? What happened?” Harry asked urgently.

The anger faded from Hagrid’s face. He looked suddenly anxious.

“I never expected this,” he said, in a low, worried voice. “I had no idea, when Dumbledore told me there might be trouble gettin’ hold of yeh, how much yeh didn’t know. Ah, Harry, I don’ know if I’m the right person ter tell yeh — but someone’s gotta — yeh can’t go off ter Hogwarts not knowin’.”

He threw a dirty look at the Dursleys.

“Well, it’s best yeh know as much as I can tell yeh — mind, I can’t tell yeh everythin’, it’s a great myst’ry, parts of it. . . .”

He sat down, stared into the fire for a few seconds, and then said, “It begins, I suppose, with — with a person called — but it’s incredible yeh don’t know his name, everyone in our world knows —”

“Who?”

“Well — I don’ like sayin’ the name if I can help it. No one does.”

“Why not?”

“Gulpin’ gargoyles, Harry, people are still scared. Blimey, this is difficult. See, there was this wizard who went . . . bad. As bad as you could go. Worse. Worse than worse. His name was . . .”

Hagrid gulped, but no words came out.

“Could you write it down?” Harry suggested.

“Nah — can’t spell it. All right — *Voldemort*.” Hagrid shuddered. “Don’ make me say it again. Anyway, this — this wizard, about twenty years ago now, started lookin’ fer followers. Got ’em, too — some were afraid, some just wanted a bit o’ his power, ’cause he was gettin’ himself power, all right. Dark days, Harry. Didn’t

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know who ter trust, didn't dare get friendly with strange wizards or witches . . . terrible things happened. He was takin' over. 'Course, some stood up to him — an' he killed 'em. Horribly. One o' the only safe places left was Hogwarts. Reckon Dumbledore's the only one You-Know-Who was afraid of. Didn't dare try takin' the school, not jus' then, anyway.

"Now, yer mum an' dad were as good a witch an' wizard as I ever knew. Head boy an' girl at Hogwarts in their day! Suppose the myst'ry is why You-Know-Who never tried to get 'em on his side before . . . probably knew they were too close ter Dumbledore ter want anythin' ter do with the Dark Side.

"Maybe he thought he could persuade 'em . . . maybe he just wanted 'em outta the way. All anyone knows is, he turned up in the village where you was all living, on Halloween ten years ago. You was just a year old. He came ter yer house an' — an' —"

Hagrid suddenly pulled out a very dirty, spotted handkerchief and blew his nose with a sound like a foghorn.

"Sorry," he said. "But it's that sad — knew yer mum an' dad, an' nicer people yeh couldn't find — anyway . . .

"You-Know-Who killed 'em. An' then — an' this is the real myst'ry of the thing — he tried to kill you, too. Wanted ter make a clean job of it, I suppose, or maybe he just liked killin' by then. But he couldn't do it. Never wondered how you got that mark on yer forehead? That was no ordinary cut. That's what yeh get when a powerful, evil curse touches yeh — took care of yer mum an' dad an' yer house, even — but it didn't work on you, an' that's why yer famous, Harry. No one ever lived after he decided ter kill 'em, no one except you, an' he'd killed some o' the best witches an' wizards



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of the age — the McKinnons, the Bones, the Prewetts — an' you was only a baby, an' you lived."

Something very painful was going on in Harry's mind. As Hagrid's story came to a close, he saw again the blinding flash of green light, more clearly than he had ever remembered it before — and he remembered something else, for the first time in his life: a high, cold, cruel laugh.

Hagrid was watching him sadly.

"Took yeh from the ruined house myself, on Dumbledore's orders. Brought yeh ter this lot . . ."

"Load of old tosh," said Uncle Vernon. Harry jumped; he had almost forgotten that the Dursleys were there. Uncle Vernon certainly seemed to have got back his courage. He was glaring at Hagrid and his fists were clenched.

"Now, you listen here, boy," he snarled, "I accept there's something strange about you, probably nothing a good beating wouldn't have cured — and as for all this about your parents, well, they were weirdos, no denying it, and the world's better off without them in my opinion — asked for all they got, getting mixed up with these wizarding types — just what I expected, always knew they'd come to a sticky end —"

But at that moment, Hagrid leapt from the sofa and drew a battered pink umbrella from inside his coat. Pointing this at Uncle Vernon like a sword, he said, "I'm warning you, Dursley — I'm warning you — one more word . . ."

In danger of being speared on the end of an umbrella by a bearded giant, Uncle Vernon's courage failed again; he flattened himself against the wall and fell silent.

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“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.

“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?



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“Hagrid,” he said quietly, “I think you must have made a mistake. I don’t think I can be a wizard.”

To his surprise, Hagrid chuckled.

“Not a wizard, eh? Never made things happen when you was scared or angry?”

Harry looked into the fire. Now he came to think about it . . . every odd thing that had ever made his aunt and uncle furious with him had happened when he, Harry, had been upset or angry . . . chased by Dudley’s gang, he had somehow found himself out of their reach . . . dreading going to school with that ridiculous haircut, he’d managed to make it grow back . . . and the very last time Dudley had hit him, hadn’t he got his revenge, without even realizing he was doing it? Hadn’t he set a boa constrictor on him?

Harry looked back at Hagrid, smiling, and saw that Hagrid was positively beaming at him.

“See?” said Hagrid. “Harry Potter, not a wizard — you wait, you’ll be right famous at Hogwarts.”

But Uncle Vernon wasn’t going to give in without a fight.

“Haven’t I told you he’s not going?” he hissed. “He’s going to Stonewall High and he’ll be grateful for it. I’ve read those letters and he needs all sorts of rubbish — spell books and wands and —”

“If he wants ter go, a great Muggle like you won’t stop him,” growled Hagrid. “Stop Lily an’ James Potter’s son goin’ ter Hogwarts! Yer mad. His name’s been down ever since he was born. He’s off ter the finest school of witchcraft and wizardry in the world. Seven years there and he won’t know himself. He’ll be with youngsters of his own sort, fer a change, an’ he’ll be under the greatest headmaster Hogwarts ever had, Albus Dumbled—”