



THE SORTING HAT



staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry was just wondering how much farther they had to go when they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in midair ahead of them, and as Percy took a step toward them they started throwing themselves at him.

“Peeves,” Percy whispered to the first years. “A poltergeist.” He raised his voice, “Peeves — show yourself.”

A loud, rude sound, like the air being let out of a balloon, answered.

“Do you want me to go to the Bloody Baron?”

There was a pop, and a little man with wicked, dark eyes and a wide mouth appeared, floating cross-legged in the air, clutching the walking sticks.

“Oooooooh!” he said, with an evil cackle. “Ickle Firsties! What fun!”

He swooped suddenly at them. They all ducked.

“Go away, Peeves, or the Baron’ll hear about this, I mean it!” barked Percy.

Peeves stuck out his tongue and vanished, dropping the walking sticks on Neville’s head. They heard him zooming away, rattling coats of armor as he passed.

“You want to watch out for Peeves,” said Percy, as they set off again. “The Bloody Baron’s the only one who can control him, he won’t even listen to us prefects. Here we are.”

At the very end of the corridor hung a portrait of a very fat woman in a pink silk dress.

“Password?” she said.



CHAPTER SEVEN



“Caput Draconis,” said Percy, and the portrait swung forward to reveal a round hole in the wall. They all scrambled through it — Neville needed a leg up — and found themselves in the Gryffindor common room, a cozy, round room full of squashy armchairs.

Percy directed the girls through one door to their dormitory and the boys through another. At the top of a spiral staircase — they were obviously in one of the towers — they found their beds at last: five four-posters hung with deep red, velvet curtains. Their trunks had already been brought up. Too tired to talk much, they pulled on their pajamas and fell into bed.

“Great food, isn’t it?” Ron muttered to Harry through the hangings. “Get *off*, Scabbers! He’s chewing my sheets.”

Harry was going to ask Ron if he’d had any of the treacle tart, but he fell asleep almost at once.

Perhaps Harry had eaten a bit too much, because he had a very strange dream. He was wearing Professor Quirrell’s turban, which kept talking to him, telling him he must transfer to Slytherin at once, because it was his destiny. Harry told the turban he didn’t want to be in Slytherin; it got heavier and heavier; he tried to pull it off but it tightened painfully — and there was Malfoy, laughing at him as he struggled with it — then Malfoy turned into the hook-nosed teacher, Snape, whose laugh became high and cold — there was a burst of green light and Harry woke, sweating and shaking.

He rolled over and fell asleep again, and when he woke next day, he didn’t remember the dream at all.

C H A P T E R E I G H T



THE POTIONS MASTER

There, look.”
“Where?”

“Next to the tall kid with the red hair.”

“Wearing the glasses?”

“Did you see his face?”

“Did you see his scar?”

Whispers followed Harry from the moment he left his dormitory the next day. People lining up outside classrooms stood on tip-toe to get a look at him, or doubled back to pass him in the corridors again, staring. Harry wished they wouldn't, because he was trying to concentrate on finding his way to classes.

There were a hundred and forty-two staircases at Hogwarts: wide, sweeping ones; narrow, rickety ones; some that led somewhere different on a Friday; some with a vanishing step halfway up that you had to remember to jump. Then there were doors that



CHAPTER EIGHT



wouldn't open unless you asked politely, or tickled them in exactly the right place, and doors that weren't really doors at all, but solid walls just pretending. It was also very hard to remember where anything was, because it all seemed to move around a lot. The people in the portraits kept going to visit each other, and Harry was sure the coats of armor could walk.

The ghosts didn't help, either. It was always a nasty shock when one of them glided suddenly through a door you were trying to open. Nearly Headless Nick was always happy to point new Gryffindors in the right direction, but Peeves the Poltergeist was worth two locked doors and a trick staircase if you met him when you were late for class. He would drop wastepaper baskets on your head, pull rugs from under your feet, pelt you with bits of chalk, or sneak up behind you, invisible, grab your nose, and screech, "GOT YOUR CONK!"

Even worse than Peeves, if that was possible, was the caretaker, Argus Filch. Harry and Ron managed to get on the wrong side of him on their very first morning. Filch found them trying to force their way through a door that unluckily turned out to be the entrance to the out-of-bounds corridor on the third floor. He wouldn't believe they were lost, was sure they were trying to break into it on purpose, and was threatening to lock them in the dungeons when they were rescued by Professor Quirrell, who was passing.

Filch owned a cat called Mrs. Norris, a scrawny, dust-colored creature with bulging, lamplike eyes just like Filch's. She patrolled the corridors alone. Break a rule in front of her, put just one toe out of line, and she'd whisk off for Filch, who'd appear, wheezing, two



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seconds later. Filch knew the secret passageways of the school better than anyone (except perhaps the Weasley twins) and could pop up as suddenly as any of the ghosts. The students all hated him, and it was the dearest ambition of many to give Mrs. Norris a good kick.

And then, once you had managed to find them, there were the classes themselves. There was a lot more to magic, as Harry quickly found out, than waving your wand and saying a few funny words.

They had to study the night skies through their telescopes every Wednesday at midnight and learn the names of different stars and the movements of the planets. Three times a week they went out to the greenhouses behind the castle to study Herbology, with a dumpy little witch called Professor Sprout, where they learned how to take care of all the strange plants and fungi, and found out what they were used for.

Easily the most boring class was History of Magic, which was the only one taught by a ghost. Professor Binns had been very old indeed when he had fallen asleep in front of the staff room fire and got up next morning to teach, leaving his body behind him. Binns droned on and on while they scribbled down names and dates, and got Emeric the Evil and Uric the Oddball mixed up.

Professor Flitwick, the Charms teacher, was a tiny little wizard who had to stand on a pile of books to see over his desk. At the start of their first class he took the roll call, and when he reached Harry's name he gave an excited squeak and toppled out of sight.

Professor McGonagall was again different. Harry had been quite right to think she wasn't a teacher to cross. Strict and clever, she gave them a talking-to the moment they sat down in her first class.