**S**pending the summer with the Dursleys, Harry Potter meets Dobby, a house-elf who warns him it's too dangerous to return to Hogwarts. Dobby sabotages an important dinner for the Dursleys, who lock Harry up to prevent his return to Hogwarts. Harry's friend Ron Weasley and his brothers Fred and George rescue him in their father's flying Ford Anglia.

Harry and the Weasley family are joined by Rubeus Hagrid and Hermione Granger at a book-signing by Gilderoy Lockhart, who announces he is Hogwarts' new Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. Confronted by Draco Malfoy, Harry notices Malfoy's father, Lucius, slip a book into Ginny Weasley's belongings. When Harry and Ron are blocked from entering Platform Nine and Three-Quarters at London King's Cross railway station, they take the flying car to Hogwarts; after crashing into the Whomping Willow and breaking Ron's wand, they receive detention.

In detention, Harry hears strange voices and later finds caretaker Argus Filch's cat, Mrs. Norris, petrified beside a message written in blood: "The Chamber of Secrets has been opened, enemies of the heir... beware". Professor McGonagall explains that one of Hogwarts' founders, Salazar Slytherin, supposedly constructed a secret Chamber containing a monster that only his Heir can control, capable of purging the school of Muggle-born students. Suspecting Malfoy is the Heir, Harry, Ron, and Hermione plan to question him while disguised using forbidden polyjuice potion, which they brew in a disused bathroom haunted by a ghost, Moaning Myrtle.

During a Quidditch game, Harry's arm is broken by a Bludger. Visiting him in the infirmary, Dobby reveals that he closed the portal to Platform 9 3/4 and made the Bludger chase Harry to force him to leave the school. When Harry communicates with a snake, the school believes he is the Heir. Harry and Ron learn Malfoy is not the Heir, but his father had told him a Muggle-born girl died when the Chamber was last opened. Harry finds an enchanted diary owned by former student Tom Riddle, who fifty years prior accused Hagrid, then a student, of opening the Chamber. When the diary is stolen and Hermione is petrified, Harry and Ron question Hagrid. Professor Dumbledore, Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge, and Lucius arrive to take Hagrid to Azkaban, but he discreetly tells the boys to "follow the spiders". In the Forbidden Forest, Harry and Ron meet Hagrid's giant pet spider, Aragog, who reveals Hagrid's innocence and provides a clue about the Chamber's monster.

A book page in Hermione's hand identifies the monster as a Basilisk, a giant serpent that kills people who make direct eye contact with it; the petrified victims only saw it indirectly. The school staff learn Ginny has been taken into the Chamber, and convince Lockhart to save her. Harry and Ron find Lockhart preparing to flee, exposing him as a fraud; knowing Myrtle was the girl the Basilisk killed, they find the Chamber's entrance in her bathroom. Once inside, Lockhart seizes Ron's broken wand, but it backfires, wiping Lockhart's memory and causing a cave-in.

Harry enters the Chamber alone and finds Ginny unconscious, guarded by Riddle, who reveals that he used the diary to manipulate Ginny into reopening the Chamber, and that he is Slytherin's heir and Voldemort's younger self. After Harry expresses his loyalty to Dumbledore, Fawkes arrives with the Sorting Hat, causing Riddle to summon the Basilisk. Fawkes blinds the Basilisk, and the Sorting Hat eventually produces the Sword of Gryffindor, with which Harry battles the Basilisk, killing it and getting poisoned by one of its fangs in the process.

Despite his injury, Harry stabs the diary with the Basilisk fang, defeating Riddle and reviving Ginny. Fawkes' tears heal him, and he returns to Hogwarts with his friends and a baffled Lockhart, earning Dumbledore's praise and Hagrid's release. Harry accuses Lucius, Dobby's master, of planting the diary in Ginny's cauldron, and tricks him into freeing Dobby. The Basilisk's victims are healed, Hermione reunites with Harry and Ron, and Hagrid returns to Hogwarts.