

Chapter 1

Harry could hardly believe it, when it all sank in.

He wasn't expelled. He wasn't even getting *punished*. He'd inflated Aunt Marge, and the Ministry wouldn't even give him a slap on the wrist. But that wasn't the best part.

There were still three weeks until school began, and he would be spending them in Diagon Alley. *Alone*. Unsupervised — at least, as unsupervised as the thirteen year-old saviour of the wizarding world could *get* — allowed to do whatever he pleased, as long as he stayed within the confines of the alley. No teachers keeping an eye on him 'for his own safety', no Dumbledore with his annoyingly knowing gaze, no Mrs Weasley herding him around like one of her own. Not even Ron and Hermione. He could go where he liked, and not have to explain his actions to anyone.

He'd never had such freedom before. Harry couldn't wait to make the most of it.

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For the first few days, Harry didn't push the boundaries. He spent most of his time sat at a sunny table outside Fortescue's, doing his homework with a tall ice cream sundae at his side, charmed not to melt too quickly. It was a nice change from doing it under his blankets in the dead of night — and it let him see if anyone was actually keeping an eye on him. It was a perfect spot to people-watch, to keep track of anyone who might linger too long or look his way too often. He was noticed — of course he was noticed, he was Harry Potter — but no one seemed to be following him. Even when he left the ice cream parlour and went to explore, he couldn't see anyone keeping watch. He stuck to places he would be expected to go, of course. Quality Quidditch Supplies, Flourish and Blotts, Gambol and Japes'. Normal haunts for a thirteen year-old wizard.

Only after he'd finished all his homework, and made absolutely sure that he wasn't being secretly supervised, did Harry start to widen his exploration. In the past, when he'd been to Diagon Alley, whichever adult was with him had just wanted to get school supplies and get out as quickly as possible. Honestly, Harry didn't blame them, especially when he was with the whole Weasley family. But Diagon was *so much bigger* than he'd thought it was. There were all kinds of side-alleys with small shops and vendor stalls. Sure you could buy potion supplies, and spellbooks, and brooms — you could also buy enchanted jewellery and elaborate sweets and bespelled household objects, and a million other things in between. It made sense, Harry supposed; wizards didn't have a lot of places to shop, and you couldn't just conjure everything you needed. Diagon was like the biggest shopping centre wizards could go to. And it was all open to him, now.

Harry couldn't resist. With a bag of assorted sweets from Sugarplum's in hand, he meticulously scoured every inch of the alley from one end to the other, determined to uncover all its hidden joys. He bought a practice snitch at Quality Quidditch Supplies, and a self-inking quill from Scribbulus Writing Instruments. He spent almost an hour in the back of the