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 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 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.