

J. K. ROWLING
HARRY
POTTER
AND THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE



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B L O O M S B U R Y

When a letter arrives for unhappy but ordinary Harry Potter, a decade-old secret is revealed to him. His parents were wizards, killed by a Dark Lord's curse when Harry was just a baby, and which he somehow survived. Escaping from his unbearable Muggle guardians to Hogwarts, a wizarding school brimming with ghosts and enchantments, Harry stumbles into a sinister adventure when he finds a three-headed dog guarding a room on the third floor. Then he hears of a missing stone with astonishing powers which could be valuable, dangerous, or both.

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J. K. Rowling



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*for Jessica, who loves stories,
for Anne, who loved them too,
and for Di, who heard this one first.*



The Boy Who Lived

Mr and Mrs Dursley, of number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much. They were the last people you'd expect to be involved in anything strange or mysterious, because they just didn't hold with such nonsense.

Mr Dursley was the director of a firm called Grunnings, which made drills. He was a big, beefy man with hardly any neck, although he did have a very large moustache. Mrs Dursley was thin and blonde and had nearly twice the usual amount of neck, which came in very useful as she spent so much of her time craning over garden fences, spying on the neighbours. The Dursleys had a small son called Dudley and in their opinion there was no finer boy anywhere.

The Dursleys had everything they wanted, but they also had a secret, and their greatest fear was that somebody would discover it. They didn't think they could bear it if anyone found out about the Potters. Mrs Potter was Mrs Dursley's sister, but they hadn't met for several years; in fact, Mrs Dursley pretended she didn't have a sister, because her sister and her good-for-nothing husband were as unDursleyish as it was possible to be. The Dursleys shuddered to think what the neighbours would say if the Potters arrived in the street. The Dursleys knew that the Potters had a small son, too, but they had never even seen him. This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that.

When Mr and Mrs Dursley woke up on the dull, grey Tuesday our story starts, there was nothing about the cloudy sky outside to suggest that strange and mysterious things would soon be happening all over the country. Mr Dursley hummed as he picked out his most boring tie for work and Mrs Dursley gossiped away

happily as she wrestled a screaming Dudley into his high chair.

None of them noticed a large tawny owl flutter past the window.

At half past eight, Mr Dursley picked up his briefcase, pecked Mrs Dursley on the cheek and tried to kiss Dudley goodbye but missed, because Dudley was now having a tantrum and throwing his cereal at the walls. 'Little tyke,' chortled Mr Dursley as he left the house. He got into his car and backed out of number four's drive.

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar – a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr Dursley didn't realise what he had seen – then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light. Mr Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror. It was now reading the sign that said *Privet Drive* – no, *looking* at the sign; cats couldn't read maps *or* signs. Mr Dursley gave himself a little shake and put the cat out of his mind. As he drove towards town he thought of nothing except a large order of drills he was hoping to get that day.

But on the edge of town, drills were driven out of his mind by something else. As he sat in the usual morning traffic jam, he couldn't help noticing that there seemed to be a lot of strangely dressed people about. People in cloaks. Mr Dursley couldn't bear people who dressed in funny clothes – the get-ups you saw on young people! He supposed this was some stupid new fashion. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and his eyes fell on a huddle of these weirdos standing quite close by. They were whispering excitedly together. Mr Dursley was enraged to see that a couple of them weren't young at all; why, that man had to be older than he was, and wearing an emerald-green cloak! The nerve of him! But then it struck Mr Dursley that this was probably some silly stunt – these people were obviously collecting for something ... yes, that would be it. The traffic moved on, and a few minutes later, Mr Dursley arrived in the Grunnings car park, his mind back on drills.

Mr Dursley always sat with his back to the window in his office on the ninth floor. If he hadn't, he might have found it harder to concentrate on drills that morning. *He* didn't see the owls

swooping past in broad daylight, though people down in the street did; they pointed and gazed open-mouthed as owl after owl sped overhead. Most of them had never seen an owl even at night-time. Mr Dursley, however, had a perfectly normal, owl-free morning. He yelled at five different people. He made several important telephone calls and shouted a bit more. He was in a very good mood until lunch-time, when he thought he'd stretch his legs and walk across the road to buy himself a bun from the baker's opposite.

He'd forgotten all about the people in cloaks until he passed a group of them next to the baker's. He eyed them angrily as he passed. He didn't know why, but they made him uneasy. This lot were whispering excitedly, too, and he couldn't see a single collecting tin. It was on his way back past them, clutching a large doughnut in a bag, that he caught a few words of what they were saying.

'The Potters, that's right, that's what I heard –'

'– yes, their son, Harry –'

Mr Dursley stopped dead. Fear flooded him. He looked back at the whisperers as if he wanted to say something to them, but thought better of it.

He dashed back across the road, hurried up to his office, snapped at his secretary not to disturb him, seized his telephone and had almost finished dialling his home number when he changed his mind. He put the receiver back down and stroked his moustache, thinking ... no, he was being stupid. Potter wasn't such an unusual name. He was sure there were lots of people called Potter who had a son called Harry. Come to think of it, he wasn't even sure his nephew was called Harry. He'd never even seen the boy. It might have been Harvey. Or Harold. There was no point in worrying Mrs Dursley, she always got so upset at any mention of her sister. He didn't blame her – if *he'd* had a sister like that ... but all the same, those people in cloaks ...

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 'P 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. The Potters knew very well what he and

Petunia thought about them and their kind ... He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on. He yawned and turned over. It couldn't affect *them* ...

How very wrong he was.

Mr Dursley might have been drifting into an uneasy sleep, but the cat on the wall outside was showing no sign of sleepiness. It was sitting as still as a statue, its eyes fixed unblinkingly on the far corner of Privet Drive. It didn't so much as quiver when a car door slammed in the next street, nor when two owls swooped overhead. In fact, it was nearly midnight before the cat moved at all.

A man appeared on the corner the cat had been watching, appeared so suddenly and silently you'd have thought he'd just popped out of the ground. The cat's tail twitched and its eyes narrowed.

Nothing like this man had ever been seen in Privet Drive. He was tall, thin and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak which swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots. His blue eyes were light, bright and sparkling behind half-moon spectacles and his nose was very long and crooked, as though it had been broken at least twice. This man's name was Albus Dumbledore.

Albus Dumbledore didn't seem to realise that he had just arrived in a street where everything from his name to his boots was unwelcome. He was busy rummaging in his cloak, looking for something. But he did seem to realise he was being watched, because he looked up suddenly at the cat, which was still staring at him from the other end of the street. For some reason, the sight of the cat seemed to amuse him. He chuckled and muttered, 'I should have known.'

He had found what he was looking for in his inside pocket. It seemed to be a silver cigarette lighter. He flicked it open, held it up in the air and clicked it. The nearest street lamp went out with a little pop. He clicked it again – the next lamp flickered into darkness. Twelve times he clicked the Put-Outer, until the only lights left in the whole street were two tiny pinpricks in the distance, which were the eyes of the cat watching him. If anyone looked out of their window now, even beady-eyed Mrs Dursley, they wouldn't be able to see anything that was happening down on the pavement. Dumbledore slipped the Put-Outer back inside

his cloak and set off down the street towards number four, where he sat down on the wall next to the cat. He didn't look at it, but after a moment he spoke to it.

'Fancy seeing you here, Professor McGonagall.'

He turned to smile at the tabby, but it had gone. Instead he was smiling at a rather severe-looking woman who was wearing square glasses exactly the shape of the markings the cat had had around its eyes. She, too, was wearing a cloak, an emerald one. Her black hair was drawn into a tight bun. She looked distinctly ruffled.

'How did you know it was me?' she asked.

'My dear Professor, I've never seen a cat sit so stiffly.'

'You'd be stiff if you'd been sitting on a brick wall all day,' said Professor McGonagall.

'All day? When you could have been celebrating? I must have passed a dozen feasts and parties on my way here.'

Professor McGonagall sniffed angrily.

'Oh yes, everyone's celebrating, all right,' she said impatiently. 'You'd think they'd be a bit more careful, but no – even the Muggles have noticed something's going on. It was on their news.' She jerked her head back at the Dursleys' dark living-room window. 'I heard it. Flocks of owls ... shooting stars ... Well, they're not completely stupid. They were bound to notice something. Shooting stars down in Kent – I'll bet that was Dedalus Diggle. He never had much sense.'

'You can't blame them,' said Dumbledore gently. 'We've had precious little to celebrate for eleven years.'

'I know that,' said Professor McGonagall irritably. 'But that's no reason to lose our heads. People are being downright careless, out on the streets in broad daylight, not even dressed in Muggle clothes, swapping rumours.'

She threw a sharp, sideways glance at Dumbledore here, as though hoping he was going to tell her something, but he didn't, so she went on: 'A fine thing it would be if, on the very day You-Know-Who seems to have disappeared at last, the Muggles found out about us all. I suppose he really *has* gone, Dumbledore?'

'It certainly seems so,' said Dumbledore. 'We have much to be thankful for. Would you care for a sherbet lemon?'

'A *what*?'

'A sherbet lemon. They're a kind of Muggle sweet I'm rather fond of.'

‘No, thank you,’ said Professor McGonagall coldly, as though she didn’t think this was the moment for sherbet lemons. ‘As I say, even if You-Know-Who *has* gone –’

‘My dear Professor, surely a sensible person like yourself can call him by his name? All this “You-Know-Who” nonsense – for eleven years I have been trying to persuade people to call him by his proper name: *Voldemort*.’ Professor McGonagall flinched, but Dumbledore, who was unsticking two sherbet lemons, seemed not to notice. ‘It all gets so confusing if we keep saying “You-Know-Who”.’ I have never seen any reason to be frightened of saying *Voldemort*’s name.’

‘I know you haven’t,’ said Professor McGonagall, sounding half-exasperated, half-admiring. ‘But you’re different. Everyone knows you’re the only one You-Know – oh, all right, *Voldemort* – was frightened of.’

‘You flatter me,’ said Dumbledore calmly. ‘*Voldemort* had powers I will never have.’

‘Only because you’re too – well – *noble* to use them.’

‘It’s lucky it’s dark. I haven’t blushed so much since Madam Pomfrey told me she liked my new earmuffs.’

Professor McGonagall shot a sharp look at Dumbledore and said, ‘The owls are nothing to the *rumours* that are flying around. You know what everyone’s saying? About why he’s disappeared? About what finally stopped him?’

It seemed that Professor McGonagall had reached the point she was most anxious to discuss, the real reason she had been waiting on a cold hard wall all day, for neither as a cat nor as a woman had she fixed Dumbledore with such a piercing stare as she did now. It was plain that whatever ‘everyone’ was saying, she was not going to believe it until Dumbledore told her it was true. Dumbledore, however, was choosing another sherbet lemon and did not answer.

‘What they’re *saying*,’ she pressed on, ‘is that last night *Voldemort* turned up in Godric’s Hollow. He went to find the Potters. The rumour is that Lily and James Potter are – are – that they’re – *dead*.’

Dumbledore bowed his head. Professor McGonagall gasped.

‘Lily and James ... I can’t believe it ... I didn’t want to believe it ... Oh, Albus ...’

Dumbledore reached out and patted her on the shoulder. ‘I

know ... I know ...' he said heavily.

Professor McGonagall's voice trembled as she went on. 'That's not all. They're saying he tried to kill the Potters' son, Harry. But – he couldn't. He couldn't kill that little boy. No one knows why, or how, but they're saying that when he couldn't kill Harry Potter, Voldemort's power somehow broke – and that's why he's gone.'

Dumbledore nodded glumly.

'It's – it's *true*?' faltered Professor McGonagall. 'After all he's done ... all the people he's killed ... he couldn't kill a little boy? It's just astounding ... of all the things to stop him ... but how in the name of heaven did Harry survive?'

'We can only guess,' said Dumbledore. 'We may never know.'

Professor McGonagall pulled out a lace handkerchief and dabbed at her eyes beneath her spectacles. Dumbledore gave a great sniff as he took a golden watch from his pocket and examined it. It was a very odd watch. It had twelve hands but no numbers; instead, little planets were moving around the edge. It must have made sense to Dumbledore, though, because he put it back in his pocket and said, 'Hagrid's late. I suppose it was he who told you I'd be here, by the way?'

'Yes,' said Professor McGonagall. 'And I don't suppose you're going to tell me *why* you're here, of all places?'

'I've come to bring Harry to his aunt and uncle. They're the only family he has left now.'

'You don't mean – you *can't* mean the people who live *here*?' cried Professor McGonagall, jumping to her feet and pointing at number four. 'Dumbledore – you can't. I've been watching them all day. You couldn't find two people who are less like us. And they've got this son – I saw him kicking his mother all the way up the street, screaming for sweets. Harry Potter come and live here!'

'It's the best place for him,' said Dumbledore firmly. 'His aunt and uncle will be able to explain everything to him when he's older. I've written them a letter.'

'A letter?' repeated Professor McGonagall faintly, sitting back down on the wall. 'Really, Dumbledore, you think you can explain all this in a letter? These people will never understand him! He'll be famous – a legend – I wouldn't be surprised if today was known as Harry Potter Day in future – there will be books written about Harry – every child in our world will know his name!'

'Exactly,' said Dumbledore, looking very seriously over the top

of his half-moon glasses. 'It would be enough to turn any boy's head. Famous before he can walk and talk! Famous for something he won't even remember! Can't you see how much better off he'll be, growing up away from all that until he's ready to take it?'

Professor McGonagall opened her mouth, changed her mind, swallowed and then said, 'Yes – yes, you're right, of course. But how is the boy getting here, Dumbledore?' She eyed his cloak suddenly as though she thought he might be hiding Harry underneath it.

'Hagrid's bringing him.'

'You think it – *wise* – to trust Hagrid with something as important as this?'

'I would trust Hagrid with my life,' said Dumbledore.

'I'm not saying his heart isn't in the right place,' said Professor McGonagall grudgingly, 'but you can't pretend he's not careless. He does tend to – what was that?'

A low rumbling sound had broken the silence around them. It grew steadily louder as they looked up and down the street for some sign of a headlight; it swelled to a roar as they both looked up at the sky – and a huge motorbike fell out of the air and landed on the road in front of them.

If the motorbike was huge, it was nothing to the man sitting astride it. He was almost twice as tall as a normal man and at least five times as wide. He looked simply too big to be allowed, and so *wild* – long tangles of bushy black hair and beard hid most of his face, he had hands the size of dustbin lids and his feet in their leather boots were like baby dolphins. In his vast, muscular arms he was holding a bundle of blankets.

'Hagrid,' said Dumbledore, sounding relieved. 'At last. And where did you get that motorbike?'

'Borrowed it, Professor Dumbledore, sir,' said the giant, climbing carefully off the motorbike as he spoke. 'Young Sirius Black lent it me. I've got him, sir.'

'No problems, were there?'

'No, sir – house was almost destroyed but I got him out all right before the Muggles started swarmin' around. He fell asleep as we was flyin' over Bristol.'

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall bent forward over the bundle of blankets. Inside, just visible, was a baby boy, fast asleep. Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a

curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning.

‘Is that where –?’ whispered Professor McGonagall.

‘Yes,’ said Dumbledore. ‘He’ll have that scar for ever.’

‘Couldn’t you do something about it, Dumbledore?’

‘Even if I could, I wouldn’t. Scars can come in useful. I have one myself above my left knee which is a perfect map of the London Underground. Well – give him here, Hagrid – we’d better get this over with.’

Dumbledore took Harry in his arms and turned towards the Dursleys’ house.

‘Could I – could I say goodbye to him, sir?’ asked Hagrid.

He bent his great, shaggy head over Harry and gave him what must have been a very scratchy, whiskery kiss. Then, suddenly, Hagrid let out a howl like a wounded dog.

‘Shhh!’ hissed Professor McGonagall. ‘You’ll wake the Muggles!’

‘S-s-sorry,’ sobbed Hagrid, taking out a large spotted handkerchief and burying his face in it. ‘But I c-c-can’t stand it – Lily an’ James dead – an’ poor little Harry off ter live with Muggles –’

‘Yes, yes, it’s all very sad, but get a grip on yourself, Hagrid, or we’ll be found,’ Professor McGonagall whispered, patting Hagrid gingerly on the arm as Dumbledore stepped over the low garden wall and walked to the front door. He laid Harry gently on the doorstep, took a letter out of his cloak, tucked it inside Harry’s blankets and then came back to the other two. For a full minute the three of them stood and looked at the little bundle; Hagrid’s shoulders shook, Professor McGonagall blinked furiously and the twinkling light that usually shone from Dumbledore’s eyes seemed to have gone out.

‘Well,’ said Dumbledore finally, ‘that’s that. We’ve no business staying here. We may as well go and join the celebrations.’

‘Yeah,’ said Hagrid in a very muffled voice. ‘I’d best get this bike away. G’night, Professor McGonagall – Professor Dumbledore, sir.’

Wiping his streaming eyes on his jacket sleeve, Hagrid swung himself on to the motorbike and kicked the engine into life; with a roar it rose into the air and off into the night.

‘I shall see you soon, I expect, Professor McGonagall,’ said Dumbledore, nodding to her. Professor McGonagall blew her nose in reply.

Dumbledore turned and walked back down the street. On the

corner he stopped and took out the silver Put-Outer. He clicked it once and twelve balls of light sped back to their street lamps so that Privet Drive glowed suddenly orange and he could make out a tabby cat slinking around the corner at the other end of the street. He could just see the bundle of blankets on the step of number four.

‘Good luck, Harry,’ he murmured. He turned on his heel and with a swish of his cloak he was gone.

A breeze ruffled the neat hedges of Privet Drive, which lay silent and tidy under the inky sky, the very last place you would expect astonishing things to happen. Harry Potter rolled over inside his blankets without waking up. One small hand closed on the letter beside him and he slept on, not knowing he was special, not knowing he was famous, not knowing he would be woken in a few hours’ time by Mrs Dursley’s scream as she opened the front door to put out the milk bottles, nor that he would spend the next few weeks being prodded and pinched by his cousin Dudley ... He couldn’t know that at this very moment, people meeting in secret all over the country were holding up their glasses and saying in hushed voices: ‘To Harry Potter – the boy who lived!’

The Vanishing Glass

Nearly ten years had passed since the Dursleys had woken up to find their nephew on the front step, but Privet Drive had hardly changed at all. The sun rose on the same tidy front gardens and lit up the brass number four on the Dursleys' front door; it crept into their living-room, which was almost exactly the same as it had been on the night when Mr Dursley had seen that fateful news report about the owls. Only the photographs on the mantelpiece really showed how much time had passed. Ten years ago, there had been lots of pictures of what looked like a large pink beach ball wearing different-coloured bobble hats – but Dudley Dursley was no longer a baby, and now the photographs showed a large, blond boy riding his first bicycle, on a roundabout at the fair, playing a computer game with his father, being hugged and kissed by his mother. The room held no sign at all that another boy lived in the house, too.

Yet Harry Potter was still there, asleep at the moment, but not for long. His Aunt Petunia was awake and it was her shrill voice which made the first noise of the day.

'Up! Get up! Now!'

Harry woke with a start. His aunt rapped on the door again.

'Up!' she screeched. Harry heard her walking towards the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the cooker. He rolled on to his back and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one. There had been a flying motorbike in it. He had a funny feeling he'd had the same dream before.

His aunt was back outside the door.

'Are you up yet?' she demanded.

'Nearly,' said Harry.

'Well, get a move on, I want you to look after the bacon. And

don't you dare let it burn, I want everything perfect on Duddy's birthday.'

Harry groaned.

'What did you say?' his aunt snapped through the door.

'Nothing, nothing ...'

Dudley's birthday – how could he have forgotten? Harry got slowly out of bed and started looking for socks. He found a pair under his bed and, after pulling a spider off one of them, put them on. Harry was used to spiders, because the cupboard under the stairs was full of them, and that was where he slept.

When he was dressed he went down the hall into the kitchen. The table was almost hidden beneath all Dudley's birthday presents. It looked as though Dudley had got the new computer he wanted, not to mention the second television and the racing bike. Exactly why Dudley wanted a racing bike was a mystery to Harry, as Dudley was very fat and hated exercise – unless of course it involved punching somebody. Dudley's favourite punch-bag was Harry, but he couldn't often catch him. Harry didn't look it, but he was very fast.

Perhaps it had something to do with living in a dark cupboard, but Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier than he really was because all he had to wear were old clothes of Dudley's and Dudley was about four times bigger than he was. Harry had a thin face, knobbly knees, black hair and bright-green eyes. He wore round glasses held together with a lot of Sellotape because of all the times Dudley had punched him on the nose. The only thing Harry liked about his own appearance was a very thin scar on his forehead which was shaped like a bolt of lightning. He had had it as long as he could remember and the first question he could ever remember asking his Aunt Petunia was how he had got it.

'In the car crash when your parents died,' she had said. 'And don't ask questions.'

Don't ask questions – that was the first rule for a quiet life with the Dursleys.

Uncle Vernon entered the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon.

'Comb your hair!' he barked, by way of a morning greeting.

About once a week, Uncle Vernon looked over the top of his newspaper and shouted that Harry needed a haircut. Harry must

have had more haircuts than the rest of the boys in his class put together, but it made no difference, his hair simply grew that way – all over the place.

Harry was frying eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen with his mother. Dudley looked a lot like Uncle Vernon. He had a large, pink face, not much neck, small, watery blue eyes and thick, blond hair that lay smoothly on his thick, fat head. Aunt Petunia often said that Dudley looked like a baby angel – Harry often said that Dudley looked like a pig in a wig.

Harry put the plates of egg and bacon on the table, which was difficult as there wasn't much room. Dudley, meanwhile, was counting his presents. His face fell.

'Thirty-six,' he said, looking up at his mother and father. 'That's two less than last year.'

'Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present, see, it's here under this big one from Mummy and Daddy.'

'All right, thirty-seven then,' said Dudley, going red in the face. Harry, who could see a huge Dudley tantrum coming on, began wolfing down his bacon as fast as possible in case Dudley turned the table over.

Aunt Petunia obviously scented danger too, because she said quickly, 'And we'll buy you another *two* presents while we're out today. How's that, popkin? *Two* more presents. Is that all right?'

Dudley thought for a moment. It looked like hard work. Finally he said slowly, 'So I'll have thirty ... thirty ...'

'Thirty-nine, sweetums,' said Aunt Petunia.

'Oh.' Dudley sat down heavily and grabbed the nearest parcel. 'All right then.'

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

'Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. Atta boy, Dudley!' He ruffled Dudley's hair.

At that moment the telephone rang and Aunt Petunia went to answer it while Harry and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap the racing bike, a cine-camera, a remote-control aeroplane, sixteen new computer games and a video recorder. He was ripping the paper off a gold wristwatch when Aunt Petunia came back from the telephone, looking both angry and worried.

'Bad news, Vernon,' she said. 'Mrs Figg's broken her leg. She can't take him.' She jerked her head in Harry's direction.

Dudley's mouth fell open in horror but Harry's heart gave a

leap. Every year on Dudley's birthday his parents took him and a friend out for the day, to adventure parks, hamburger bars or the cinema. Every year, Harry was left behind with Mrs Figg, a mad old lady who lived two streets away. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled of cabbage and Mrs Figg made him look at photographs of all the cats she'd ever owned.

'Now what?' said Aunt Petunia, looking furiously at Harry as though he'd planned this. Harry knew he ought to feel sorry that Mrs Figg had broken her leg, but it wasn't easy when he reminded himself it would be a whole year before he had to look at Tibbles, Snowy, Mr Paws and Tufty again.

'We could phone Marge,' Uncle Vernon suggested.

'Don't be silly, Vernon, she hates the boy.'

The Dursleys often spoke about Harry like this, as though he wasn't there – or rather, as though he was something very nasty that couldn't understand them, like a slug.

'What about what's-her-name, your friend – Yvonne?'

'On holiday in Majorca,' snapped Aunt Petunia.

'You could just leave me here,' Harry put in hopefully (he'd be able to watch what he wanted on television for a change and maybe even have a go on Dudley's computer).

Aunt Petunia looked as though she'd just swallowed a lemon.

'And come back and find the house in ruins?' she snarled.

'I won't blow up the house,' said Harry, but they weren't listening.

'I suppose we could take him to the zoo,' said Aunt Petunia slowly, '... and leave him in the car ...'

'That car's new, he's not sitting in it alone ...'

Dudley began to cry loudly. In fact, he wasn't really crying, it had been years since he'd really cried, but he knew that if he screwed up his face and wailed, his mother would give him anything he wanted.

'Dinky Duddydums, don't cry, Mummy won't let him spoil your special day!' she cried, flinging her arms around him.

'I ... don't ... want ... him ... t-t-to come!' Dudley yelled between huge pretend sobs. 'He always sp-spoils everything!' He shot Harry a nasty grin through the gap in his mother's arms.

Just then, the doorbell rang – 'Oh, Good Lord, they're here!' said Aunt Petunia frantically – and a moment later, Dudley's best friend, Piers Polkiss, walked in with his mother. Piers was a scrawny boy with a face like a rat. He was usually the one who

held people's arms behind their backs while Dudley hit them. Dudley stopped pretending to cry at once.

Half an hour later, Harry, who couldn't believe his luck, was sitting in the back of the Dursleys' car with Piers and Dudley, on the way to the zoo for the first time in his life. His aunt and uncle hadn't been able to think of anything else to do with him, but before they'd left, Uncle Vernon had taken Harry aside.

'I'm warning you,' he had said, putting his large purple face right up close to Harry's, 'I'm warning you now, boy – any funny business, anything at all – and you'll be in that cupboard from now until Christmas.'

'I'm not going to do anything,' said Harry, 'honestly ...'

But Uncle Vernon didn't believe him. No one ever did.

The problem was, strange things often happened around Harry and it was just no good telling the Dursleys he didn't make them happen.

Once, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry coming back from the barber's looking as though he hadn't been at all, had taken a pair of kitchen scissors and cut his hair so short he was almost bald except for his fringe, which she left 'to hide that horrible scar'. Dudley had laughed himself silly at Harry, who spent a sleepless night imagining school the next day, where he was already laughed at for his baggy clothes and Sellotaped glasses. Next morning, however, he had got up to find his hair exactly as it had been before Aunt Petunia had sheared it off. He had been given a week in his cupboard for this, even though he had tried to explain that he *couldn't* explain how it had grown back so quickly.

Another time, Aunt Petunia had been trying to force him into a revolting old jumper of Dudley's (brown with orange bobbles). The harder she tried to pull it over his head, the smaller it seemed to become, until finally it might have fitted a glove puppet, but certainly wouldn't fit Harry. Aunt Petunia had decided it must have shrunk in the wash and, to his great relief, Harry wasn't punished.

On the other hand, he'd got into terrible trouble for being found on the roof of the school kitchens. Dudley's gang had been chasing him as usual when, as much to Harry's surprise as anyone else's, there he was sitting on the chimney. The Dursleys had received a very angry letter from Harry's headmistress telling them Harry had been climbing school buildings. But all he'd tried to do

(as he shouted at Uncle Vernon through the locked door of his cupboard) was jump behind the big bins outside the kitchen doors. Harry supposed that the wind must have caught him in mid-jump.

But today, nothing was going to go wrong. It was even worth being with Dudley and Piers to be spending the day somewhere that wasn't school, his cupboard or Mrs Figg's cabbage-smelling living-room.

While he drove, Uncle Vernon complained to Aunt Petunia. He liked to complain about things: people at work, Harry, the council, Harry, the bank and Harry were just a few of his favourite subjects. This morning, it was motorbikes.

'... roaring along like maniacs, the young hoodlums,' he said, as a motorbike overtook them.

'I had a dream about a motorbike,' said Harry, remembering suddenly. 'It was flying.'

Uncle Vernon nearly crashed into the car in front. He turned right around in his seat and yelled at Harry, his face like a gigantic beetroot with a moustache, 'MOTORBIKES DON'T FLY!'

Dudley and Piers sniggered.

'I know they don't,' said Harry. 'It was only a dream.'

But he wished he hadn't said anything. If there was one thing the Dursleys hated even more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't, no matter if it was in a dream or even a cartoon – they seemed to think he might get dangerous ideas.

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice-creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap lemon ice lolly. It wasn't bad either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head and looking remarkably like Dudley, except that it wasn't blond.

Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. He was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals by lunch-time, wouldn't fall back on their favourite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory wasn't big enough,

Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterwards, that he should have known it was all too good to last.

After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in here, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons. Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a dustbin – but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep.

Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.

'Make it move,' he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

'Do it again,' Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

'This is boring,' Dudley moaned. He shuffled away.

Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself – no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia hammering on the door to wake you up – at least he got to visit the rest of the house.

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

It winked.

Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. He looked back at the snake and winked, too.

The snake jerked its head towards Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised its eyes to the ceiling. It gave Harry a look that said quite plainly: *'I get that all the time.'*

'I know,' Harry murmured through the glass, though he wasn't sure the snake could hear him. 'It must be really annoying.'

The snake nodded vigorously.

'Where do you come from, anyway?' Harry asked.

The snake jabbed its tail at a little sign next to the glass. Harry peered at it.

Boa Constrictor, Brazil.

‘Was it nice there?’

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on: *This specimen was bred in the zoo.* ‘Oh, I see – so you’ve never been to Brazil?’

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Harry made both of them jump. ‘DUDLEY! MR DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON’T BELIEVE WHAT IT’S DOING!’

Dudley came waddling towards them as fast as he could.

‘Out of the way, you,’ he said, punching Harry in the ribs. Caught by surprise, Harry fell hard on the concrete floor. What came next happened so fast no one saw how it happened – one second, Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with howls of horror.

Harry sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor’s tank had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering out on to the floor – people throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have sworn a low, hissing voice said, ‘Brazil, here I come ... Thanksss, amigo.’

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

‘But the glass,’ he kept saying, ‘where did the glass go?’

The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong sweet tea while he apologised over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only gibber. As far as Harry had seen, the snake hadn’t done anything except snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were all back in Uncle Vernon’s car, Dudley was telling them how it had nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to squeeze him to death. But worst of all, for Harry at least, was Piers calming down enough to say, ‘Harry was talking to it, weren’t you, Harry?’

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, ‘Go – cupboard – stay – no meals,’ before he collapsed into a chair and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him a large brandy.

Harry lay in his dark cupboard much later, wishing he had a watch. He didn't know what time it was and he couldn't be sure the Dursleys were asleep yet. Until they were, he couldn't risk sneaking to the kitchen for some food.

He'd lived with the Dursleys almost ten years, ten miserable years, as long as he could remember, ever since he'd been a baby and his parents had died in that car crash. He couldn't remember being in the car when his parents had died. Sometimes, when he strained his memory during long hours in his cupboard, he came up with a strange vision: a blinding flash of green light and a burning pain on his forehead. This, he supposed, was the crash, though he couldn't imagine where all the green light came from. He couldn't remember his parents at all. His aunt and uncle never spoke about them, and of course he was forbidden to ask questions. There were no photographs of them in the house.

When he had been younger, Harry had dreamed and dreamed of some unknown relation coming to take him away, but it had never happened; the Dursleys were his only family. Yet sometimes he thought (or maybe hoped) that strangers in the street seemed to know him. Very strange strangers they were, too. A tiny man in a violet top hat had bowed to him once while out shopping with Aunt Petunia and Dudley. After asking Harry furiously if he knew the man, Aunt Petunia had rushed them out of the shop without buying anything. A wild-looking old woman dressed all in green had waved merrily at him once on a bus. A bald man in a very long purple coat had actually shaken his hand in the street the other day and then walked away without a word. The weirdest thing about all these people was the way they seemed to vanish the second Harry tried to get a closer look.

At school, Harry had no one. Everybody knew that Dudley's gang hated that odd Harry Potter in his baggy old clothes and broken glasses, and nobody liked to disagree with Dudley's gang.

The Letters from No One

The escape of the Brazilian boa constrictor earned Harry his longest-ever punishment. By the time he was allowed out of his cupboard again, the summer holidays had started and Dudley had already broken his new cine-camera, crashed his remote-control aeroplane and, first time on his racing bike, knocked down old Mrs Figg as she crossed Privet Drive on her crutches.

Harry was glad school was over, but there was no escaping Dudley's gang, who visited the house every single day. Piers, Dennis, Malcolm and Gordon were all big and stupid, but as Dudley was the biggest and stupidest of the lot, he was the leader. The rest of them were all quite happy to join in Dudley's favourite sport: Harry-hunting.

This was why Harry spent as much time as possible out of the house, wandering around and thinking about the end of the holidays, where he could see a tiny ray of hope. When September came he would be going off to secondary school and, for the first time in his life, he wouldn't be with Dudley. Dudley had a place at Uncle Vernon's old school, Smeltings. Piers Polkiss was going there, too. Harry, on the other hand, was going to Stonewall High, the local comprehensive. Dudley thought this was very funny.

'They stuff people's heads down the toilet first day at Stonewall,' he told Harry. 'Want to come upstairs and practise?'

'No thanks,' said Harry. 'The poor toilet's never had anything as horrible as your head down it - it might be sick.' Then he ran, before Dudley could work out what he'd said.

One day in July, Aunt Petunia took Dudley to London to buy his Smeltings uniform, leaving Harry at Mrs Figg's. Mrs Figg wasn't as bad as usual. It turned out she'd broken her leg tripping over one of her cats and she didn't seem quite as fond of them as before. She let Harry watch television and gave him a bit of

chocolate cake that tasted as though she'd had it for several years.

That evening, Dudley paraded around the living-room for the family in his brand-new uniform. Smeltings boys wore maroon tailcoats, orange knickerbockers and flat straw hats called boaters. They also carried knobbly sticks, used for hitting each other while the teachers weren't looking. This was supposed to be good training for later life.

As he looked at Dudley in his new knickerbockers, Uncle Vernon said gruffly that it was the proudest moment of his life. Aunt Petunia burst into tears and said she couldn't believe it was her Ickle Dudleykins, he looked so handsome and grown-up. Harry didn't trust himself to speak. He thought two of his ribs might already have cracked from trying not to laugh.

There was a horrible smell in the kitchen next morning when Harry went in for breakfast. It seemed to be coming from a large metal tub in the sink. He went to have a look. The tub was full of what looked like dirty rags swimming in grey water.

'What's this?' he asked Aunt Petunia. Her lips tightened as they always did if he dared to ask a question.

'Your new school uniform,' she said.

Harry looked in the bowl again.

'Oh,' he said. 'I didn't realise it had to be so wet.'

'Don't be stupid,' snapped Aunt Petunia. 'I'm dyeing some of Dudley's old things grey for you. It'll look just like everyone else's when I've finished.'

Harry seriously doubted this, but thought it best not to argue. He sat down at the table and tried not to think about how he was going to look on his first day at Stonewall High – like he was wearing bits of old elephant skin, probably.

Dudley and Uncle Vernon came in, both with wrinkled noses because of the smell from Harry's new uniform. Uncle Vernon opened his newspaper as usual and Dudley banged his Smeltings stick, which he carried everywhere, on the table.

They heard the click of the letter-box and flop of letters on the doormat.

'Get the post, Dudley,' said Uncle Vernon from behind his paper.

'Make Harry get it.'

'Get the post, Harry.'

'Make Dudley get it.'

‘Poke him with your Smeltings stick, Dudley.’

Harry dodged the Smeltings stick and went to get the post. Three things lay on the doormat: a postcard from Uncle Vernon’s sister Marge, who was holidaying on the Isle of Wight, a brown envelope that looked like a bill and – *a letter for Harry*.

Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like a giant elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life, had written to him. Who would? He had no friends, no other relatives – he didn’t belong to the library so he’d never even got rude notes asking for books back. Yet here it was, a letter, addressed so plainly there could be no mistake:

*Mr H. Potter
The Cupboard under the Stairs
4 Privet Drive
Little Whinging
Surrey*

The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald-green ink. There was no stamp.

Turning the envelope over, his hand trembling, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms; a lion, an eagle, a badger and a snake surrounding a large letter ‘H’.

‘Hurry up, boy!’ shouted Uncle Vernon from the kitchen. ‘What are you doing, checking for letter-bombs?’ He chuckled at his own joke.

Harry went back to the kitchen, still staring at his letter. He handed Uncle Vernon the bill and the postcard, sat down and slowly began to open the yellow envelope.

Uncle Vernon ripped open the bill, snorted in disgust and flipped over the postcard.

‘Marge’s ill,’ he informed Aunt Petunia. ‘Ate a funny whelk ...’

‘Dad!’ said Dudley suddenly. ‘Dad, Harry’s got something!’

Harry was on the point of unfolding his letter, which was written on the same heavy parchment as the envelope, when it was jerked sharply out of his hand by Uncle Vernon.

‘That’s *mine!*’ said Harry, trying to snatch it back.

‘Who’d be writing to you?’ sneered Uncle Vernon, shaking the letter open with one hand and glancing at it. His face went from

red to green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn't stop there. Within seconds it was the greyish white of old porridge.

'P-P-Petunia!' he gasped.

Dudley tried to grab the letter to read it, but Uncle Vernon held it high out of his reach. Aunt Petunia took it curiously and read the first line. For a moment it looked as though she might faint. She clutched her throat and made a choking noise.

'Vernon! Oh my goodness – Vernon!'

They stared at each other, seeming to have forgotten that Harry and Dudley were still in the room. Dudley wasn't used to being ignored. He gave his father a sharp tap on the head with his Smeltings stick.

'I want to read that letter,' he said loudly.

'I want to read it,' said Harry furiously, 'as it's *mine*.'

'Get out, both of you,' croaked Uncle Vernon, stuffing the letter back inside its envelope.

Harry didn't move.

'I WANT MY LETTER!' he shouted.

'Let *me* see it!' demanded Dudley.

'OUT!' roared Uncle Vernon, and he took both Harry and Dudley by the scruffs of their necks and threw them into the hall, slamming the kitchen door behind them. Harry and Dudley promptly had a furious but silent fight over who would listen at the keyhole; Dudley won, so Harry, his glasses dangling from one ear, lay flat on his stomach to listen at the crack between door and floor.

'Vernon,' Aunt Petunia was saying in a quivering voice, 'look at the address – how could they possibly know where he sleeps? You don't think they're watching the house?'

'Watching – spying – might be following us,' muttered Uncle Vernon wildly.

'But what should we do, Vernon? Should we write back? Tell them we don't want –'

Harry could see Uncle Vernon's shiny black shoes pacing up and down the kitchen.

'No,' he said finally. 'No, we'll ignore it. If they don't get an answer ... yes, that's best ... we won't do anything ...'

'But –'

'I'm not having one in the house, Petunia! Didn't we swear when we took him in we'd stamp out that dangerous nonsense?'

That evening when he got back from work, Uncle Vernon did something he'd never done before; he visited Harry in his cupboard.

'Where's my letter?' said Harry, the moment Uncle Vernon had squeezed through the door. 'Who's writing to me?'

'No one. It was addressed to you by mistake,' said Uncle Vernon shortly. 'I have burned it.'

'It was *not* a mistake,' said Harry angrily. 'It had my cupboard on it.'

'SILENCE!' yelled Uncle Vernon, and a couple of spiders fell from the ceiling. He took a few deep breaths and then forced his face into a smile, which looked quite painful.

'Er – yes, Harry – about this cupboard. Your aunt and I have been thinking ... you're really getting a bit big for it ... we think it might be nice if you moved into Dudley's second bedroom.'

'Why?' said Harry.

'Don't ask questions!' snapped his uncle. 'Take this stuff upstairs, now.'

The Dursleys' house had four bedrooms: one for Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia, one for visitors (usually Uncle Vernon's sister, Marge), one where Dudley slept and one where Dudley kept all the toys and things that wouldn't fit into his first bedroom. It only took Harry one trip upstairs to move everything he owned from the cupboard to this room. He sat down on the bed and stared around him. Nearly everything in here was broken. The month-old cine-camera was lying on top of a small, working tank Dudley had once driven over next door's dog; in the corner was Dudley's first-ever television set, which he'd put his foot through when his favourite programme had been cancelled; there was a large bird-cage which had once held a parrot that Dudley had swapped at school for a real air-rifle, which was up on a shelf with the end all bent because Dudley had sat on it. Other shelves were full of books. They were the only things in the room that looked as though they'd never been touched.

From downstairs came the sound of Dudley bawling at his mother: 'I don't *want* him in there ... I *need* that room ... make him get out ...'

Harry sighed and stretched out on the bed. Yesterday he'd have given anything to be up here. Today he'd rather be back in his cupboard with that letter than up here without it.

Next morning at breakfast, everyone was rather quiet. Dudley was

in shock. He'd screamed, whacked his father with his Smeltings stick, been sick on purpose, kicked his mother and thrown his tortoise through the greenhouse roof and he still didn't have his room back. Harry was thinking about this time yesterday and bitterly wishing he'd opened the letter in the hall. Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia kept looking at each other darkly.

When the post arrived, Uncle Vernon, who seemed to be trying to be nice to Harry, made Dudley go and get it. They heard him banging things with his Smeltings stick all the way down the hall. Then he shouted, 'There's another one! *Mr H. Potter, The Smallest Bedroom, 4 Privet Drive* –'

With a strangled cry, Uncle Vernon leapt from his seat and ran down the hall, Harry right behind him. Uncle Vernon had to wrestle Dudley to the ground to get the letter from him, which was made difficult by the fact that Harry had grabbed Uncle Vernon around the neck from behind. After a minute of confused fighting, in which everyone got hit a lot by the Smeltings stick, Uncle Vernon straightened up, gasping for breath, with Harry's letter clutched in his hand.

'Go to your cupboard – I mean, your bedroom,' he wheezed at Harry. 'Dudley – go – just go.'

Harry walked round and round his new room. Someone knew he had moved out of his cupboard and they seemed to know he hadn't received his first letter. Surely that meant they'd try again? And this time he'd make sure they didn't fail. He had a plan.

*

The repaired alarm clock rang at six o'clock the next morning. Harry turned it off quickly and dressed silently. He mustn't wake the Dursleys. He stole downstairs without turning on any of the lights.

He was going to wait for the postman on the corner of Privet Drive and get the letters for number four first. His heart hammered as he crept across the dark hall towards the front door –

'AAAAARRRGH!'

Harry leapt into the air – he'd trodden on something big and squashy on the doormat – something *alive!*

Lights clicked on upstairs and to his horror Harry realised that the big squashy something had been his uncle's face. Uncle Vernon had been lying at the foot of the front door in a sleeping bag, clearly making sure that Harry didn't do exactly what he'd

been trying to do. He shouted at Harry for about half an hour and then told him to go and make a cup of tea. Harry shuffled miserably off into the kitchen, and by the time he got back, the post had arrived, right into Uncle Vernon's lap. Harry could see three letters addressed in green ink.

'I want –' he began, but Uncle Vernon was tearing the letters into pieces before his eyes.

Uncle Vernon didn't go to work that day. He stayed at home and nailed up the letter-box.

'See,' he explained to Aunt Petunia through a mouthful of nails, 'if they can't *deliver* them they'll just give up.'

'I'm not sure that'll work, Vernon.'

'Oh, these people's minds work in strange ways, Petunia, they're not like you and me,' said Uncle Vernon, trying to knock in a nail with the piece of fruit cake Aunt Petunia had just brought him.

*

On Friday, no fewer than twelve letters arrived for Harry. As they couldn't go through the letter-box they had been pushed under the door, slotted through the sides and a few even forced through the small window in the downstairs toilet.

Uncle Vernon stayed at home again. After burning all the letters, he got out a hammer and nails and boarded up the cracks around the front and back doors so no one could go out. He hummed 'Tiptoe through the Tulips' as he worked, and jumped at small noises.

*

On Saturday, things began to get out of hand. Twenty-four letters to Harry found their way into the house, rolled up and hidden inside each of the two dozen eggs that their very confused milkman had handed Aunt Petunia through the living-room window. While Uncle Vernon made furious telephone calls to the post office and the dairy trying to find someone to complain to, Aunt Petunia shredded the letters in her food mixer.

'Who on earth wants to talk to *you* this badly?' Dudley asked Harry in amazement.

*

On Sunday morning, Uncle Vernon sat down at the breakfast table looking tired and rather ill, but happy.

'No post on Sundays,' he reminded them happily as he spread

marmalade on his newspapers, 'no damn letters today –'

Something came whizzing down the kitchen chimney as he spoke and caught him sharply on the back of the head. Next moment, thirty or forty letters came pelting out of the fireplace like bullets. The Dursleys ducked, but Harry leapt into the air trying to catch one –

'Out! OUT!'

Uncle Vernon seized Harry around the waist and threw him into the hall. When Aunt Petunia and Dudley had run out with their arms over their faces, Uncle Vernon slammed the door shut. They could hear the letters still streaming into the room, bouncing off the walls and floor.

'That does it,' said Uncle Vernon, trying to speak calmly but pulling great tufts out of his moustache at the same time. 'I want you all back here in five minutes, ready to leave. We're going away. Just pack some clothes. No arguments!'

He looked so dangerous with half his moustache missing that no one dared argue. Ten minutes later they had wrenched their way through the boarded-up doors and were in the car, speeding towards the motorway. Dudley was sniffing in the back seat; his father had hit him round the head for holding them up while he tried to pack his television, video and computer in his sports bag.

They drove. And they drove. Even Aunt Petunia didn't dare ask where they were going. Every now and then Uncle Vernon would take a sharp turning and drive in the opposite direction for a while.

'Shake 'em off ... shake 'em off,' he would mutter whenever he did this.

They didn't stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall Dudley was howling. He'd never had such a bad day in his life. He was hungry, he'd missed five television programmes he'd wanted to see and he'd never gone so long without blowing up an alien on his computer.

Uncle Vernon stopped at last outside a gloomy-looking hotel on the outskirts of a big city. Dudley and Harry shared a room with twin beds and damp, musty sheets. Dudley snored but Harry stayed awake, sitting on the window-sill, staring down at the lights of passing cars and wondering ...

They ate stale cornflakes and cold tinned tomatoes on toast for breakfast next day. They had just finished when the owner of the hotel came over to their table.

‘Scuse me, but is one of you Mr H. Potter? Only I got about an ‘undred of these at the front desk.’

She held up a letter so they could read the green ink address:

*Mr H. Potter
Room 17
Railview Hotel
Cokeworth*

Harry made a grab for the letter but Uncle Vernon knocked his hand out of the way. The woman stared.

‘I’ll take them,’ said Uncle Vernon, standing up quickly and following her from the dining-room.

*

‘Wouldn’t it be better just to go home, dear?’ Aunt Petunia suggested timidly, hours later, but Uncle Vernon didn’t seem to hear her. Exactly what he was looking for, none of them knew. He drove them into the middle of a forest, got out, looked around, shook his head, got back in the car and off they went again. The same thing happened in the middle of a ploughed field, halfway across a suspension bridge and at the top of a multi-storey car park.

‘Daddy’s gone mad, hasn’t he?’ Dudley asked Aunt Petunia dully late that afternoon. Uncle Vernon had parked at the coast, locked them all inside the car and disappeared.

It started to rain. Great drops beat on the roof of the car. Dudley snivelled.

‘It’s Monday,’ he told his mother. ‘The Great Humberto’s on tonight. I want to stay somewhere with a *television*.’

Monday. This reminded Harry of something. If it was Monday – and you could usually count on Dudley to know the days of the week, because of television – then tomorrow, Tuesday, was Harry’s eleventh birthday. Of course, his birthdays were never exactly fun – last year, the Dursleys had given him a coat-hanger and a pair of Uncle Vernon’s old socks. Still, you weren’t eleven every day.

Uncle Vernon was back and he was smiling. He was also carrying a long, thin package and didn’t answer Aunt Petunia when she

asked what he'd bought.

'Found the perfect place!' he said. 'Come on! Everyone out!'

It was very cold outside the car. Uncle Vernon was pointing at what looked like a large rock way out to sea. Perched on top of the rock was the most miserable little shack you could imagine. One thing was certain, there was no television in there.

'Storm forecast for tonight!' said Uncle Vernon gleefully, clapping his hands together. 'And this gentleman's kindly agreed to lend us his boat!'

A toothless old man came ambling up to them, pointing, with a rather wicked grin, at an old rowing boat bobbing in the iron-grey water below them.

'I've already got us some rations,' said Uncle Vernon, 'so all aboard!'

It was freezing in the boat. Icy sea spray and rain crept down their necks and a chilly wind whipped their faces. After what seemed like hours they reached the rock, where Uncle Vernon, slipping and sliding, led the way to the broken-down house.

The inside was horrible; it smelled strongly of seaweed, the wind whistled through the gaps in the wooden walls and the fireplace was damp and empty. There were only two rooms.

Uncle Vernon's rations turned out to be a packet of crisps each and four bananas. He tried to start a fire but the empty crisp packets just smoked and shrivelled up.

'Could do with some of those letters now, eh?' he said cheerfully.

He was in a very good mood. Obviously he thought nobody stood a chance of reaching them here in a storm to deliver post. Harry privately agreed, though the thought didn't cheer him up at all.

As night fell, the promised storm blew up around them. Spray from the high waves splattered the walls of the hut and a fierce wind rattled the filthy windows. Aunt Petunia found a few mouldy blankets in the second room and made up a bed for Dudley on the moth-eaten sofa. She and Uncle Vernon went off to the lumpy bed next door and Harry was left to find the softest bit of floor he could and to curl up under the thinnest, most ragged blanket.

The storm raged more and more ferociously as the night went on. Harry couldn't sleep. He shivered and turned over, trying to

get comfortable, his stomach rumbling with hunger. Dudley's snores were drowned by the low rolls of thunder that started near midnight. The lighted dial of Dudley's watch, which was dangling over the edge of the sofa on his fat wrist, told Harry he'd be eleven in ten minutes' time. He lay and watched his birthday tick nearer, wondering if the Dursleys would remember at all, wondering where the letter-writer was now.

Five minutes to go. Harry heard something creak outside. He hoped the roof wasn't going to fall in, although he might be warmer if it did. Four minutes to go. Maybe the house in Privet Drive would be so full of letters when they got back that he'd be able to steal one somehow.

Three minutes to go. Was that the sea, slapping hard on the rock like that? And (two minutes to go) what was that funny crunching noise? Was the rock crumbling into the sea?

One minute to go and he'd be eleven. Thirty seconds ... twenty ... ten – nine – maybe he'd wake Dudley up, just to annoy him – three – two – one –

BOOM.

The whole shack shivered and Harry sat bolt upright, staring at the door. Someone was outside, knocking to come in.

The Keeper of the Keys

BOOM. They knocked again. Dudley jerked awake.

‘Where’s the cannon?’ he said stupidly.

There was a crash behind them and Uncle Vernon came skidding into the room. He was holding a rifle in his hands – now they knew what had been in the long, thin package he had brought with them.

‘Who’s there?’ he shouted. ‘I warn you – I’m armed!’

There was a pause. Then –

SMASH!

The door was hit with such force that it swung clean off its hinges and with a deafening crash landed flat on the floor.

A giant of a man was standing in the doorway. His face was almost completely hidden by a long, shaggy mane of hair and a wild, tangled beard, but you could make out his eyes, glinting like black beetles under all the hair.

The giant squeezed his way into the hut, stooping so that his head just brushed the ceiling. He bent down, picked up the door and fitted it easily back into its frame. The noise of the storm outside dropped a little. He turned to look at them all.

‘Couldn’t make us a cup o’ tea, could yeh? It’s not been an easy journey ...’

He strode over to the sofa where Dudley sat frozen with fear.

‘Budge up, yeh great lump,’ said the stranger.

Dudley squeaked and ran to hide behind his mother, who was crouching, terrified, behind Uncle Vernon.

‘An’ here’s Harry!’ said the giant.

Harry looked up into the fierce, wild, shadowy face and saw that the beetle eyes were crinkled in a smile.

‘Las’ time I saw you, you was only a baby,’ said the giant. ‘Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh’ve got yer mum’s eyes.’

Uncle Vernon made a funny rasping noise.

'I demand that you leave at once, sir!' he said. 'You are breaking and entering!'

'Ah, shut up, Dursley, yeh great prune,' said the giant. He reached over the back of the sofa, jerked the gun out of Uncle Vernon's hands, bent it into a knot as easily as if it had been made of rubber, and threw it into a corner of the room.

Uncle Vernon made another funny noise, like a mouse being trodden on.

'Anyway – Harry,' said the giant, turning his back on the Dursleys, 'a very happy birthday to yeh. Got summat fer yeh here – I mighta sat on it at some point, but it'll taste all right.'

From an inside pocket of his black overcoat he pulled a slightly squashed box. Harry opened it with trembling fingers. Inside was a large, sticky chocolate cake with *Happy Birthday Harry* written on it in green icing.

Harry looked up at the giant. He meant to say thank you, but the words got lost on the way to his mouth, and what he said instead was, 'Who are you?'

The giant chuckled.

'True, I haven't introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts.'

He held out an enormous hand and shook Harry's whole arm.

'What about that tea then, eh?' he said, rubbing his hands together. 'I'd not say no ter summat stronger if yeh've got it, mind.'

His eyes fell on the empty grate with the shrivelled crisp packets in it and he snorted. He bent down over the fireplace; they couldn't see what he was doing but when he drew back a second later, there was a roaring fire there. It filled the whole damp hut with flickering light and Harry felt the warmth wash over him as though he'd sunk into a hot bath.

The giant sat back down on the sofa, which sagged under his weight, and began taking all sorts of things out of the pockets of his coat: a copper kettle, a squashy package of sausages, a poker, a teapot, several chipped mugs and a bottle of some amber liquid which he took a swig from before starting to make tea. Soon the hut was full of the sound and smell of sizzling sausage. Nobody said a thing while the giant was working, but as he slid the first six fat, juicy, slightly burnt sausages from the poker, Dudley

figgeted a little. Uncle Vernon said sharply, 'Don't touch anything he gives you, Dudley.'

The giant chuckled darkly.

'Yer great puddin' of a son don' need fattenin' any more, Dursley, don' worry.'

He passed the sausages to Harry, who was so hungry he had never tasted anything so wonderful, but he still couldn't take his eyes off the giant. Finally, as nobody seemed about to explain anything, he said, 'I'm sorry, but I still don't really know who you are.'

The giant took a gulp of tea and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

'Call me Hagrid,' he said, 'everyone does. An' like I told yeh, I'm Keeper of Keys at Hogwarts – yeh'll know all about Hogwarts, o' course.'

'Er – no,' said Harry.

Hagrid looked shocked.

'Sorry,' Harry said quickly.

'*Sorry?*' barked Hagrid, turning to stare at the Dursleys, who shrank back into the shadows. 'It's them as should be sorry! I knew yeh weren't gettin' yer letters but I never thought yeh wouldn't even know abou' Hogwarts, fer cryin' out loud! Did yeh never wonder where yer parents learnt it all?'

'All what?' asked Harry.

'ALL WHAT?' Hagrid thundered. 'Now wait jus' one second!'

He had leapt to his feet. In his anger he seemed to fill the whole hut. The Dursleys were cowering against the wall.

'Do you mean ter tell me,' he growled at the Dursleys, 'that this boy – this boy! – knows nothin' abou' – about ANYTHING?'

Harry thought this was going a bit far. He had been to school, after all, and his marks weren't bad.

'I know *some* things,' he said. 'I can, you know, do maths and stuff.'

But Hagrid simply waved his hand and said, 'About *our* world, I mean. *Your* world. *My* world. *Yer parents' world.*'

'What world?'

Hagrid looked as if he was about to explode.

'DURSLEY!' he boomed.

Uncle Vernon, who had gone very pale, whispered something that sounded like 'Mimblewimble'. Hagrid stared wildly at Harry.

'But yeh must know about yer mum and dad,' he said. 'I mean,

they're famous. You're famous.'

'What? My – my mum and dad weren't famous, were they?'

'Yeh don' know ... yeh don' know ...' Hagrid ran his fingers through his hair, fixing Harry with a bewildered stare.

'Yeh don' know what yeh *are*?' he said finally.

Uncle Vernon suddenly found his voice.

'Stop!' he commanded. 'Stop right there, sir! I forbid you to tell the boy anything!'

A braver man than Vernon Dursley would have quailed under the furious look Hagrid now gave him; when Hagrid spoke, his every syllable trembled with rage.

'You never told him? Never told him what was in the letter Dumbledore left fer him? I was there! I saw Dumbledore leave it, Dursley! An' you've kept it from him all these years?'

'Kept *what* from me?' said Harry eagerly.

'STOP! I FORBID YOU!' yelled Uncle Vernon in panic.

Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

'Ah, go boil yer heads, both of yeh,' said Hagrid. 'Harry – yer a wizard.'

There was silence inside the hut. Only the sea and the whistling wind could be heard.

'I'm a *what*?' gasped Harry.

'A wizard, o' course,' said Hagrid, sitting back down on the sofa, which groaned and sank even lower, 'an' a thumpin' good'un, I'd say, once yeh've been trained up a bit. With a mum an' dad like yours, what else would yeh be? An' I reckon it's abou' time yeh read yer letter.'

Harry stretched out his hand at last to take the yellowish envelope, addressed in emerald green to *Mr H. Potter, The Floor, Hut-on-the-Rock, The Sea*. He pulled out the letter and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

Headmaster: Albus Dumbledore

*(Order of Merlin, First Class, Grand Sorc., Chf. Warlock,
Supreme Mugwump, International Confed. of Wizards)*

Dear Mr Potter,

*We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at
Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Please find*

enclosed a list of all necessary books and equipment.

Term begins on 1 September. We await your owl by no later than 31 July.

Yours sincerely,

*Minerva McGonagall
Deputy Headmistress*

Questions exploded inside Harry's head like fireworks and he couldn't decide which to ask first. After a few minutes he stammered, 'What does it mean, they await my owl?'

'Gallopin' Gorgons, that reminds me,' said Hagrid, clapping a hand to his forehead with enough force to knock over a cart horse, and from yet another pocket inside his overcoat he pulled an owl – a real, live, rather ruffled-looking owl – a long quill and a roll of parchment. With his tongue between his teeth he scribbled a note which Harry could read upside-down:

Dear Mr Dumbledore,

*Given Harry his letter. Taking him to buy his things tomorrow.
Weather's horrible. Hope you're well.
Hagrid*

Hagrid rolled up the note, gave it to the owl, which clamped it in its beak, went to the door and threw the owl out into the storm. Then he came back and sat down as though this was as normal as talking on the telephone.

Harry realised his mouth was open and closed it quickly.

'Where was I?' said Hagrid, but at that moment, Uncle Vernon, still ashen-faced but looking very angry, moved into the firelight.

'He's not going,' he said.

Hagrid grunted.

'I'd like ter see a great Muggle like you stop him,' he said.

'A what?' said Harry, interested.

'A Muggle,' said Hagrid. 'It's what we call non-magic folk like them. An' it's your bad luck you grew up in a family o' the biggest Muggles I ever laid eyes on.'

'We swore when we took him in we'd put a stop to that rubbish,' said Uncle Vernon, 'swore we'd stamp it out of him!'

Wizard, indeed!

'You *knew*?' said Harry. 'You *knew* I'm a – a wizard?'

'Knew!' shrieked Aunt Petunia suddenly. '*Knew!* Of course we knew! How could you not be, my dratted sister being what she was? Oh, she got a letter just like that and disappeared off to that – that *school* – and came home every holiday with her pockets full of frog-spawn, turning teacups into rats. I was the only one who saw her for what she was – a freak! But for my mother and father, oh no, it was Lily this and Lily that, they were proud of having a witch in the family!'

She stopped to draw a deep breath and then went ranting on. It seemed she had been wanting to say all this for years.

'Then she met that Potter at school and they left and got married and had you, and of course I knew you'd be just the same, just as strange, just as – as – *abnormal* – and then, if you please, she went and got herself blown up and we got landed with you!'

Harry had gone very white. As soon as he found his voice he said, 'Blown up? You told me they died in a car crash!'

'CAR CRASH!' roared Hagrid, jumping up so angrily that the Dursleys scuttled back to their corner. 'How could a car crash kill Lily an' James Potter? It's an outrage! A scandal! Harry Potter not knowin' his own story when every kid in our world knows his name!'

'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 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 Hallowe'en 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 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.

'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?

'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 realising 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—'

'I AM NOT PAYING FOR SOME CRACKPOT OLD FOOL TO TEACH HIM MAGIC TRICKS!' yelled Uncle Vernon.

But he had finally gone too far. Hagrid seized his umbrella and whirled it over his head. 'NEVER —' he thundered, '— INSULT — ALBUS — DUMBLEDORE — IN — FRONT — OF — ME!'

He brought the umbrella swishing down through the air to point at Dudley — there was a flash of violet light, a sound like a firecracker, a sharp squeal and next second, Dudley was dancing on the spot with his hands clasped over his fat bottom, howling in pain. When he turned his back on them, Harry saw a curly pig's tail poking through a hole in his trousers.

Uncle Vernon roared. Pulling Aunt Petunia and Dudley into the other room, he cast one last terrified look at Hagrid and slammed the door behind them.

Hagrid looked down at his umbrella and stroked his beard.

'Shouldn'ta lost me temper,' he said ruefully, 'but it didn't work anyway. Meant ter turn him into a pig, but I suppose he was so much like a pig anyway there wasn't much left ter do.'

He cast a sideways look at Harry under his bushy eyebrows.

'Be grateful if yeh didn't mention that ter anyone at Hogwarts,' he said. 'I'm — er — not supposed ter do magic, strictly speakin'. I was allowed ter do a bit ter follow yeh an' get yer letters to yeh an' stuff — one o' the reasons I was so keen ter take on the job —'

'Why aren't you supposed to do magic?' asked Harry.

'Oh, well — I was at Hogwarts meself but I — er — got expelled, ter tell yeh the truth. In me third year. They snapped me wand in half an' everything. But Dumbledore let me stay on as gamekeeper. Great man, Dumbledore.'

'Why were you expelled?'

'It's gettin' late and we've got lots ter do tomorrow,' said Hagrid loudly. 'Gotta get up ter town, get all yer books an' that.'

He took off his thick black coat and threw it to Harry.

'You can kip under that,' he said. 'Don' mind if it wriggles a bit, I think I still got a couple o' dormice in one o' the pockets.'

Diagon Alley

Harry woke early the next morning. Although he could tell it was daylight, he kept his eyes shut tight.

‘It was a dream,’ he told himself firmly. ‘I dreamed a giant called Hagrid came to tell me I was going to a school for wizards. When I open my eyes I’ll be at home in my cupboard.’

There was suddenly a loud tapping noise.

‘And there’s Aunt Petunia knocking on the door,’ Harry thought, his heart sinking. But he still didn’t open his eyes. It had been such a good dream.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

‘All right,’ Harry mumbled, ‘I’m getting up.’

He sat up and Hagrid’s heavy coat fell off him. The hut was full of sunlight, the storm was over, Hagrid himself was asleep on the collapsed sofa and there was an owl rapping its claw on the window, a newspaper held in its beak.

Harry scrambled to his feet, so happy he felt as though a large balloon was swelling inside him. He went straight to the window and jerked it open. The owl swooped in and dropped the newspaper on top of Hagrid, who didn’t wake up. The owl then fluttered on to the floor and began to attack Hagrid’s coat.

‘Don’t do that.’

Harry tried to wave the owl out of the way, but it snapped its beak fiercely at him and carried on savaging the coat.

‘Hagrid!’ said Harry loudly. ‘There’s an owl –’

‘Pay him,’ Hagrid grunted into the sofa.

‘What?’

‘He wants payin’ fer deliverin’ the paper. Look in the pockets.’

Hagrid’s coat seemed to be made of nothing *but* pockets – bunches of keys, slug pellets, balls of string, mint humbugs, tea-bags ... finally, Harry pulled out a handful of strange-looking coins.

'Give him five Knuts,' said Hagrid sleepily.

'Knuts?'

'The little bronze ones.'

Harry counted out five little bronze coins and the owl held out its leg so he could put the money into a small leather pouch tied to it. Then it flew off through the open window.

Hagrid yawned loudly, sat up and stretched.

'Best be off, Harry, lots ter do today, gotta get up ter London an' buy all yer stuff fer school.'

Harry was turning over the wizard coins and looking at them. He had just thought of something which made him feel as though the happy balloon inside him had got a puncture.

'Um – Hagrid?'

'Mm?' said Hagrid, who was pulling on his huge boots.

'I haven't got any money – and you heard Uncle Vernon last night – he won't pay for me to go and learn magic.'

'Don't worry about that,' said Hagrid, standing up and scratching his head. 'D'yeh think yer parents didn't leave yeh anything?'

'But if their house was destroyed –'

'They didn' keep their gold in the house, boy! Nah, first stop fer us is Gringotts. Wizards' bank. Have a sausage, they're not bad cold – an' I wouldn' say no teh a bit o' yer birthday cake, neither.'

'Wizards have *banks*?'

'Just the one. Gringotts. Run by goblins.'

Harry dropped the bit of sausage he was holding.

'*Goblins*?'

'Yeah – so yeh'd be mad ter try an' rob it, I'll tell yeh that. Never mess with goblins, Harry. Gringotts is the safest place in the world fer anything yeh want ter keep safe – 'cept maybe Hogwarts. As a matter o' fact, I gotta visit Gringotts anyway. Fer Dumbledore. Hogwarts business.' Hagrid drew himself up proudly. 'He usually gets me ter do important stuff fer him. Fetchin' you – gettin' things from Gringotts – knows he can trust me, see.'

'Got everythin'? Come on, then.'

Harry followed Hagrid out on to the rock. The sky was quite clear now and the sea gleamed in the sunlight. The boat Uncle Vernon had hired was still there, with a lot of water in the bottom after the storm.

'How did you get here?' Harry asked, looking around for another boat.

'Flew,' said Hagrid.

'Flew?'

'Yeah – but we'll go back in this. Not s'posed ter use magic now I've got yeh.'

They settled down in the boat, Harry still staring at Hagrid, trying to imagine him flying.

'Seems a shame ter row, though,' said Hagrid, giving Harry another of his sideways looks. 'If I was ter – er – speed things up a bit, would yeh mind not mentionin' it at Hogwarts?'

'Of course not,' said Harry, eager to see more magic. Hagrid pulled out the pink umbrella again, tapped it twice on the side of the boat and they sped off towards land.

'Why would you be mad to try and rob Gringotts?' Harry asked.

'Spells – enchantments,' said Hagrid, unfolding his newspaper as he spoke. 'They say there's dragons guardin' the high-security vaults. And then yeh gotta find yer way – Gringotts is hundreds of miles under London, see. Deep under the Underground. Yeh'd die of hunger tryin' ter get out, even if yeh did manage ter get yer hands on summat.'

Harry sat and thought about this while Hagrid read his newspaper, the *Daily Prophet*. Harry had learnt from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they did this, but it was very difficult, he'd never had so many questions in his life.

'Ministry o' Magic messin' things up as usual,' Hagrid muttered, turning the page.

'There's a Ministry of Magic?' Harry asked, before he could stop himself.

'Course,' said Hagrid. 'They wanted Dumbledore fer Minister, o' course, but he'd never leave Hogwarts, so old Cornelius Fudge got the job. Bungler if ever there was one. So he pelts Dumbledore with owls every morning, askin' fer advice.'

'But what does a Ministry of Magic *do*?'

'Well, their main job is to keep it from the Muggles that there's still witches an' wizards up an' down the country.'

'Why?'

'Why? Blimey, Harry, everyone'd be wantin' magic solutions to their problems. Nah, we're best left alone.'

At this moment the boat bumped gently into the harbour wall. Hagrid folded up his newspaper and they clambered up the stone steps on to the street.

Passers-by stared a lot at Hagrid as they walked through the little town to the station. Harry couldn't blame them. Not only was Hagrid twice as tall as anyone else, he kept pointing at perfectly ordinary things like parking meters and saying loudly, 'See that, Harry? Things these Muggles dream up, eh?'

'Hagrid,' said Harry, panting a bit as he ran to keep up, 'did you say there are *dragons* at Gringotts?'

'Well, so they say,' said Hagrid. 'Crikey, I'd like a dragon.'

'You'd like one?'

'Wanted one ever since I was a kid – here we go.'

They had reached the station. There was a train to London in five minutes' time. Hagrid, who didn't understand 'Muggle money', as he called it, gave the notes to Harry so he could buy their tickets.

People stared more than ever on the train. Hagrid took up two seats and sat knitting what looked like a canary-yellow circus tent.

'Still got yer letter, Harry?' he asked as he counted stitches.

Harry took the parchment envelope out of his pocket.

'Good,' said Hagrid. 'There's a list there of everything yeh need.'

Harry unfolded a second piece of paper he hadn't noticed the night before and read:

HOGWARTS SCHOOL OF WITCHCRAFT AND WIZARDRY

Uniform

First-year students will require:

1. *Three sets of plain work robes (black)*
2. *One plain pointed hat (black) for day wear*
3. *One pair of protective gloves (dragon hide or similar)*
4. *One winter cloak (black, silver fastenings)*

Please note that all pupils' clothes should carry name tags

Set Books

All students should have a copy of each of the following:

The Standard Book of Spells (Grade 1) by Miranda Goshawk

A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot

Magical Theory by Adalbert Waffling

A Beginner's Guide to Transfiguration by Emeric Switch

One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi by Phyllida Spore

Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them *by Newt Scamander*
The Dark Forces: A Guide to Self-Protection *by Quentin Trimble*

Other Equipment

- 1 wand*
- 1 cauldron (pewter, standard size 2)*
- 1 set glass or crystal phials*
- 1 telescope*
- 1 set brass scales*

Students may also bring an owl OR a cat OR a toad

*PARENTS ARE REMINDED THAT FIRST-YEARS ARE NOT
ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICKS*

‘Can we buy all this in London?’ Harry wondered aloud.

‘If yeh know where to go,’ said Hagrid.

*

Harry had never been to London before. Although Hagrid seemed to know where he was going, he was obviously not used to getting there in an ordinary way. He got stuck in the ticket barrier on the Underground and complained loudly that the seats were too small and the trains too slow.

‘I don’t know how the Muggles manage without magic,’ he said, as they climbed a broken-down escalator which led up to a bustling road lined with shops.

Hagrid was so huge that he parted the crowd easily; all Harry had to do was keep close behind him. They passed book shops and music stores, hamburger bars and cinemas, but nowhere that looked as if it could sell you a magic wand. This was just an ordinary street full of ordinary people. Could there really be piles of wizard gold buried miles beneath them? Were there really shops that sold spell books and broomsticks? Might this not all be some huge joke that the Dursleys had cooked up? If Harry hadn’t known that the Dursleys had no sense of humour, he might have thought so; yet somehow, even though everything Hagrid had told him so far was unbelievable, Harry couldn’t help trusting him.

‘This is it,’ said Hagrid, coming to a halt, ‘the Leaky Cauldron. It’s a famous place.’

It was a tiny, grubby-looking pub. If Hagrid hadn’t pointed it

out, Harry wouldn't have noticed it was there. The people hurrying by didn't glance at it. Their eyes slid from the big book shop on one side to the record shop on the other as if they couldn't see the Leaky Cauldron at all. In fact, Harry had the most peculiar feeling that only he and Hagrid could see it. Before he could mention this, Hagrid had steered him inside.

For a famous place, it was very dark and shabby. A few old women were sitting in a corner, drinking tiny glasses of sherry. One of them was smoking a long pipe. A little man in a top hat was talking to the old barman, who was quite bald and looked like a gummy walnut. The low buzz of chatter stopped when they walked in. Everyone seemed to know Hagrid; they waved and smiled at him, and the barman reached for a glass, saying, 'The usual, Hagrid?'

'Can't, Tom, I'm on Hogwarts business,' said Hagrid, clapping his great hand on Harry's shoulder and making Harry's knees buckle.

'Good Lord,' said the barman, peering at Harry, 'is this – can this be –?'

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

'Bless my soul,' whispered the old barman. 'Harry Potter ... what an honour.'

He hurried out from behind the bar, rushed towards Harry and seized his hand, tears in his eyes.

'Welcome back, Mr Potter, welcome back.'

Harry didn't know what to say. Everyone was looking at him. The old woman with the pipe was puffing on it without realising it had gone out. Hagrid was beaming.

Then there was a great scraping of chairs and, next moment, Harry found himself shaking hands with everyone in the Leaky Cauldron.

'Doris Crockford, Mr Potter, can't believe I'm meeting you at last.'

'So proud, Mr Potter, I'm just so proud.'

'Always wanted to shake your hand – I'm all of a flutter.'

'Delighted, Mr Potter, just can't tell you. Diggle's the name, Dedalus Diggle.'

'I've seen you before!' said Harry, as Dedalus Diggle's top hat fell off in his excitement. 'You bowed to me once in a shop.'

‘He remembers!’ cried Dedalus Diggle, looking around at everyone. ‘Did you hear that? He remembers me!’

Harry shook hands again and again – Doris Crockford kept coming back for more.

A pale young man made his way forward, very nervously. One of his eyes was twitching.

‘Professor Quirrell!’ said Hagrid. ‘Harry, Professor Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts.’

‘P-P-Potter,’ stammered Professor Quirrell, grasping Harry’s hand, ‘c-can’t t-tell you how p-leased I am to meet you.’

‘What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?’

‘D-Defence Against the D-D-Dark Arts,’ muttered Professor Quirrell, as though he’d rather not think about it. ‘N-not that you n-need it, eh, P-P-Potter?’ He laughed nervously. ‘You’ll be g-getting all your equipment, I suppose? I’ve g-got to p-pick up a new b-book on vampires, m-myself.’ He looked terrified at the very thought.

But the others wouldn’t let Professor Quirrell keep Harry to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all. At last, Hagrid managed to make himself heard over the babble.

‘Must get on – lots ter buy. Come on, Harry.’

Doris Crockford shook Harry’s hand one last time and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but a dustbin and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned at Harry.

‘Told yeh, didn’t I? Told yeh you was famous. Even Professor Quirrell was tremblin’ ter meet yeh – mind you, he’s usually tremblin’.’

‘Is he always that nervous?’

‘Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine while he was studyin’ outta books but then he took a year off ter get some first-hand experience ... They say he met vampires in the Black Forest and there was a nasty bit o’ trouble with a hag – never been the same since. Scared of the students, scared of his own subject – now, where’s me umbrella?’

Vampires? Hags? Harry’s head was swimming. Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting bricks in the wall above the dustbin.

‘Three up ... two across ...’ he muttered. ‘Right, stand back, Harry.’

He tapped the wall three times with the point of his umbrella.

The brick he had touched quivered – it wriggled – in the middle,

a small hole appeared – it grew wider and wider – a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway on to a cobbled street which twisted and turned out of sight.

‘Welcome,’ said Hagrid, ‘to Diagon Alley.’

He grinned at Harry’s amazement. They stepped through the archway. Harry looked quickly over his shoulder and saw the archway shrink instantly back into solid wall.

The sun shone brightly on a stack of cauldrons outside the nearest shop. *Cauldrons – All Sizes – Copper, Brass, Pewter, Silver – Self-Stirring – Collapsible* said a sign hanging over them.

‘Yeah, you’ll be needin’ one,’ said Hagrid, ‘but we gotta get yer money first.’

Harry wished he had about eight more eyes. He turned his head in every direction as they walked up the street, trying to look at everything at once: the shops, the things outside them, the people doing their shopping. A plump woman outside an apothecary’s was shaking her head as they passed, saying, ‘Dragon liver, sixteen Sickles an ounce, they’re mad ...’

A low, soft hooting came from a dark shop with a sign saying *Eeylops Owl Emporium – Tawny, Screech, Barn, Brown and Snowy*. Several boys of about Harry’s age had their noses pressed against a window with broomsticks in it. ‘Look,’ Harry heard one of them say, ‘the new Nimbus Two Thousand – fastest ever –’ There were shops selling robes, shops selling telescopes and strange silver instruments Harry had never seen before, windows stacked with barrels of bat spleens and eels’ eyes, tottering piles of spell books, quills and rolls of parchment, potion bottles, globes of the moon ...

‘Gringotts,’ said Hagrid.

They had reached a snowy-white building which towered over the other little shops. Standing beside its burnished bronze doors, wearing a uniform of scarlet and gold, was –

‘Yeah, that’s a goblin,’ said Hagrid quietly as they walked up the white stone steps towards him. The goblin was about a head shorter than Harry. He had a swarthy, clever face, a pointed beard and, Harry noticed, very long fingers and feet. He bowed as they walked inside. Now they were facing a second pair of doors, silver this time, with words engraved upon them:

*Enter, stranger, but take heed
Of what awaits the sin of greed,*

*For those who take, but do not earn,
Must pay most dearly in their turn,
So if you seek beneath our floors
A treasure that was never yours,
Thief, you have been warned, beware
Of finding more than treasure there.*

‘Like I said, yeh’d be mad ter try an’ rob it,’ said Hagrid.

A pair of goblins bowed them through the silver doors and they were in a vast marble hall. About a hundred more goblins were sitting on high stools behind a long counter, scribbling in large ledgers, weighing coins on brass scales, examining precious stones through eyeglasses. There were too many doors to count leading off the hall, and yet more goblins were showing people in and out of these. Hagrid and Harry made for the counter.

‘Morning,’ said Hagrid to a free goblin. ‘We’ve come ter take some money outta Mr Harry Potter’s safe.’

‘You have his key, sir?’

‘Got it here somewhere,’ said Hagrid and he started emptying his pockets on to the counter, scattering a handful of mouldy dog-biscuits over the goblin’s book of numbers. The goblin wrinkled his nose. Harry watched the goblin on their right weighing a pile of rubies as big as glowing coals.

‘Got it,’ said Hagrid at last, holding up a tiny golden key.

The goblin looked at it closely.

‘That seems to be in order.’

‘An’ I’ve also got a letter here from Professor Dumbledore,’ said Hagrid importantly, throwing out his chest. ‘It’s about the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen.’

The goblin read the letter carefully.

‘Very well,’ he said, handing it back to Hagrid, ‘I will have someone take you down to both vaults. Griphook!’

Griphook was yet another goblin. Once Hagrid had crammed all the dog-biscuits back inside his pockets, he and Harry followed Griphook towards one of the doors leading off the hall.

‘What’s the You-Know-What in vault seven hundred and thirteen?’ Harry asked.

‘Can’t tell yeh that,’ said Hagrid mysteriously. ‘Very secret. Hogwarts business. Dumbledore’s trusted me. More’n my job’s worth ter tell yeh that.’

Griphook held the door open for them. Harry, who had expected more marble, was surprised. They were in a narrow stone passage-way lit with flaming torches. It sloped steeply downwards and there were little railway tracks on the floor. Griphook whistled and a small cart came hurtling up the tracks towards them. They climbed in – Hagrid with some difficulty – and were off.

At first they just hurtled through a maze of twisting passages. Harry tried to remember, left, right, right, left, middle fork, right, left, but it was impossible. The rattling cart seemed to know its own way, because Griphook wasn't steering.

Harry's eyes stung as the cold air rushed past them, but he kept them wide open. Once, he thought he saw a burst of fire at the end of a passage and twisted around to see if it was a dragon, but too late – they plunged even deeper, passing an underground lake where huge stalactites and stalagmites grew from the ceiling and floor.

'I never know,' Harry called to Hagrid over the noise of the cart, 'what's the difference between a stalagmite and a stalactite?'

'Stalagmite's got an "m" in it,' said Hagrid. 'An' don' ask me questions just now, I think I'm gonna be sick.'

He did look very green and when the cart stopped at last beside a small door in the passage wall, Hagrid got out and had to lean against the wall to stop his knees trembling.

Griphook unlocked the door. A lot of green smoke came billowing out, and as it cleared, Harry gasped. Inside were mounds of gold coins. Columns of silver. Heaps of little bronze Knuts.

'All yours,' smiled Hagrid.

All Harry's – it was incredible. The Dursleys couldn't have known about this or they'd have had it from him faster than blinking. How often had they complained how much Harry cost them to keep? And all the time there had been a small fortune belonging to him, buried deep under London.

Hagrid helped Harry pile some of it into a bag.

'The gold ones are Galleons,' he explained. 'Seventeen silver Sickles to a Galleon and twenty-nine Knuts to a Sickle, it's easy enough. Right, that should be enough fer a couple o' terms, we'll keep the rest safe for yeh.' He turned to Griphook. 'Vault seven hundred and thirteen now, please, and can we go more slowly?'

'One speed only,' said Griphook.

They were going even deeper now and gathering speed. The air became colder and colder as they hurtled round tight corners.

They went rattling over an underground ravine and Harry leant over the side to try and see what was down at the dark bottom but Hagrid groaned and pulled him back by the scruff of his neck.

Vault seven hundred and thirteen had no keyhole.

‘Stand back,’ said Griphook importantly. He stroked the door gently with one of his long fingers and it simply melted away.

‘If anyone but a Gringotts goblin tried that, they’d be sucked through the door and trapped in there,’ said Griphook.

‘How often do you check to see if anyone’s inside?’ Harry asked.

‘About once every ten years,’ said Griphook, with a rather nasty grin.

Something really extraordinary had to be inside this top-security vault, Harry was sure, and he leant forward eagerly, expecting to see fabulous jewels at the very least – but at first he thought it was empty. Then he noticed a grubby little package wrapped up in brown paper lying on the floor. Hagrid picked it up and tucked it deep inside his coat. Harry longed to know what it was, but knew better than to ask.

‘Come on, back in this infernal cart, and don’t talk to me on the way back, it’s best if I keep me mouth shut,’ said Hagrid.

*

One wild cart-ride later they stood blinking in the sunlight outside Gringotts. Harry didn’t know where to run first now that he had a bag full of money. He didn’t have to know how many Galleons there were to a pound to know that he was holding more money than he’d had in his whole life – more money than even Dudley had ever had.

‘Might as well get yer uniform,’ said Hagrid, nodding towards *Madam Malkin’s Robes for All Occasions*. ‘Listen, Harry, would yeh mind if I slipped off fer a pick-me-up in the Leaky Cauldron? I hate them Gringotts carts.’ He did still look a bit sick, so Harry entered Madam Malkin’s shop alone, feeling nervous.

Madam Malkin was a squat, smiling witch dressed all in mauve.

‘Hogwarts, dear?’ she said, when Harry started to speak. ‘Got the lot here – another young man being fitted up just now, in fact.’

In the back of the shop, a boy with a pale, pointed face was standing on a footstool while a second witch pinned up his long black robes. Madam Malkin stood Harry on a stool next to him, slipped a long robe over his head and began to pin it to the right length.

'Hullo,' said the boy, 'Hogwarts too?'

'Yes,' said Harry.

'My father's next door buying my books and mother's up the street looking at wands,' said the boy. He had a bored, drawling voice. 'Then I'm going to drag them off to look at racing brooms. I don't see why first-years can't have their own. I think I'll bully father into getting me one and I'll smuggle it in somehow.'

Harry was strongly reminded of Dudley.

'Have you got your own broom?' the boy went on.

'No,' said Harry.

'Play Quidditch at all?'

'No,' Harry said again, wondering what on earth Quidditch could be.

'I do – Father says it's a crime if I'm not picked to play for my house, and I must say, I agree. Know what house you'll be in yet?'

'No,' said Harry, feeling more stupid by the minute.

'Well, no one really knows until they get there, do they, but I know I'll be in Slytherin, all our family have been – imagine being in Hufflepuff, I think I'd leave, wouldn't you?'

'Mmm,' said Harry, wishing he could say something a bit more interesting.

'I say, look at that man!' said the boy suddenly, nodding towards the front window. Hagrid was standing there, grinning at Harry and pointing at two large ice-creams to show he couldn't come in.

'That's Hagrid,' said Harry, pleased to know something the boy didn't. 'He works at Hogwarts.'

'Oh,' said the boy, 'I've heard of him. He's a sort of servant, isn't he?'

'He's the gamekeeper,' said Harry. He was liking the boy less and less every second.

'Yes, exactly. I heard he's a sort of *savage* – lives in a hut in the school grounds and every now and then he gets drunk, tries to do magic and ends up setting fire to his bed.'

'I think he's brilliant,' said Harry coldly.

'Do you?' said the boy, with a slight sneer. 'Why is he with you? Where are your parents?'

'They're dead,' said Harry shortly. He didn't feel much like going into the matter with this boy.

'Oh, sorry,' said the other, not sounding sorry at all. 'But they

were *our* kind, weren't they?'

'They were a witch and wizard, if that's what you mean.'

'I really don't think they should let the other sort in, do you? They're just not the same, they've never been brought up to know our ways. Some of them have never even heard of Hogwarts until they get the letter, imagine. I think they should keep it in the old wizarding families. What's your surname, anyway?'

But before Harry could answer, Madam Malkin said, 'That's you done, my dear,' and Harry, not sorry for an excuse to stop talking to the boy, hopped down from the footstool.

'Well, I'll see you at Hogwarts, I suppose,' said the drawling boy.

Harry was rather quiet as he ate the ice-cream Hagrid had bought him (chocolate and raspberry with chopped nuts).

'What's up?' said Hagrid.

'Nothing,' Harry lied. They stopped to buy parchment and quills. Harry cheered up a bit when he found a bottle of ink that changed colour as you wrote. When they had left the shop, he said, 'Hagrid, what's Quidditch?'

'Blimey, Harry, I keep forgettin' how little yeh know – not knowin' about Quidditch!'

'Don't make me feel worse,' said Harry. He told Hagrid about the pale boy in Madam Malkin's.

'– and he said people from Muggle families shouldn't even be allowed in –'

'Yer not *from* a Muggle family. If he'd known who yeh *were* – he's grown up knowin' yer name if his parents are wizardin' folk – you saw 'em in the Leaky Cauldron. Anyway, what does he know about it, some o' the best I ever saw were the only ones with magic in 'em in a long line o' Muggles – look at yer mum! Look what she had fer a sister!'

'So what is Quidditch?'

'It's our sport. Wizard sport. It's like – like football in the Muggle world – everyone follows Quidditch – played up in the air on broomsticks and there's four balls – sorta hard ter explain the rules.'

'And what are Slytherin and Hufflepuff?'

'School houses. There's four. Everyone says Hufflepuff are a lot o' duffers, but –'

'I bet I'm in Hufflepuff,' said Harry gloomily.

'Better Hufflepuff than Slytherin,' said Hagrid darkly. 'There's

not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one.'

'Vol- sorry - You-Know-Who was at Hogwarts?'

'Years an' years ago,' said Hagrid.

They bought Harry's school books in a shop called Flourish and Blotts where the shelves were stacked to the ceiling with books as large as paving stones bound in leather; books the size of postage stamps in covers of silk; books full of peculiar symbols and a few books with nothing in them at all. Even Dudley, who never read anything, would have been wild to get his hands on some of these. Hagrid almost had to drag Harry away from *Curses and Counter-Curses (Bewitch your Friends and Befuddle your Enemies with the Latest Revenges: Hair Loss, Jelly-Legs, Tongue-Tying and much, much more)* by Professor Vindictus Viridian.

'I was trying to find out how to curse Dudley.'

'I'm not sayin' that's not a good idea, but yer not ter use magic in the Muggle world except in very special circumstances,' said Hagrid. 'An' anyway, yeh couldn' work any of them curses yet, yeh'll need a lot more study before yeh get ter that level.'

Hagrid wouldn't let Harry buy a solid gold cauldron, either ('It says pewter on yer list'), but they got a nice set of scales for weighing potion ingredients and a collapsible brass telescope. Then they visited the apothecary's, which was fascinating enough to make up for its horrible smell, a mixture of bad eggs and rotted cabbages. Barrels of slimy stuff stood on the floor, jars of herbs, dried roots and bright powders lined the walls, bundles of feathers, strings of fangs and snarled claws hung from the ceiling. While Hagrid asked the man behind the counter for a supply of some basic potion ingredients for Harry, Harry himself examined silver unicorn horns at twenty-one Galleons each and minuscule, glittery black beetle eyes (five Knuts a scoop).

Outside the apothecary's, Hagrid checked Harry's list again.

'Just yer wand left - oh yeah, an' I still haven't got yeh a birthday present.'

Harry felt himself go red.

'You don't have to -'

'I know I don't have to. Tell yeh what, I'll get yer animal. Not a toad, toads went outta fashion years ago, yeh'd be laughed at - an' I don' like cats, they make me sneeze. I'll get yer an owl. All the kids want owls, they're dead useful, carry yer post an' everythin'.'

Twenty minutes later, they left Eeylops Owl Emporium, which had been dark and full of rustling and flickering, jewel-bright eyes. Harry now carried a large cage which held a beautiful snowy owl, fast asleep with her head under her wing. He couldn't stop stammering his thanks, sounding just like Professor Quirrell.

'Don' mention it,' said Hagrid gruffly. 'Don' expect you've had a lotta presents from them Dursleys. Just Ollivanders left now – only place fer wands, Ollivanders, and yeh gotta have the best wand.'

A magic wand ... this was what Harry had been really looking forward to.

The last shop was narrow and shabby. Peeling gold letters over the door read *Ollivanders: Makers of Fine Wands since 382 BC*. A single wand lay on a faded purple cushion in the dusty window.

A tinkling bell rang somewhere in the depths of the shop as they stepped inside. It was a tiny place, empty except for a single spindly chair which Hagrid sat on to wait. Harry felt strangely as though he had entered a very strict library; he swallowed a lot of new questions which had just occurred to him and looked instead at the thousands of narrow boxes piled neatly right up to the ceiling. For some reason, the back of his neck prickled. The very dust and silence in here seemed to tingle with some secret magic.

'Good afternoon,' said a soft voice. Harry jumped. Hagrid must have jumped, too, because there was a loud crunching noise and he got quickly off the spindly chair.

An old man was standing before them, his wide, pale eyes shining like moons through the gloom of the shop.

'Hello,' said Harry awkwardly.

'Ah yes,' said the man. 'Yes, yes. I thought I'd be seeing you soon. Harry Potter.' It wasn't a question. 'You have your mother's eyes. It seems only yesterday she was in here herself, buying her first wand. Ten and a quarter inches long, swishy, made of willow. Nice wand for charm work.'

Mr Ollivander moved closer to Harry. Harry wished he would blink. Those silvery eyes were a bit creepy.

'Your father, on the other hand, favoured a mahogany wand. Eleven inches. Pliable. A little more power and excellent for transfiguration. Well, I say your father favoured it – it's really the wand that chooses the wizard, of course.'

Mr Ollivander had come so close that he and Harry were

almost nose to nose. Harry could see himself reflected in those misty eyes.

‘And that’s where ...’

Mr Ollivander touched the lightning scar on Harry’s forehead with a long, white finger.

‘I’m sorry to say I sold the wand that did it,’ he said softly. ‘Thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Powerful wand, very powerful, and in the wrong hands ... Well, if I’d known what that wand was going out into the world to do ...’

He shook his head and then, to Harry’s relief, spotted Hagrid.

‘Rubeus! Rubeus Hagrid! How nice to see you again ... Oak, sixteen inches, rather bendy, wasn’t it?’

‘It was, sir, yes,’ said Hagrid.

‘Good wand, that one. But I suppose they snapped it in half when you got expelled?’ said Mr Ollivander, suddenly stern.

‘Er – yes, they did, yes,’ said Hagrid, shuffling his feet. ‘I’ve still got the pieces, though,’ he added brightly.

‘But you don’t use them?’ said Mr Ollivander sharply.

‘Oh, no, sir,’ said Hagrid quickly. Harry noticed he gripped his pink umbrella very tightly as he spoke.

‘Hmmm,’ said Mr Ollivander, giving Hagrid a piercing look. ‘Well, now – Mr Potter. Let me see.’ He pulled a long tape measure with silver markings out of his pocket. ‘Which is your wand arm?’

‘Er – well, I’m right-handed,’ said Harry.

‘Hold out your arm. That’s it.’ He measured Harry from shoulder to finger, then wrist to elbow, shoulder to floor, knee to armpit and round his head. As he measured, he said, ‘Every Ollivander wand has a core of a powerful magical substance, Mr Potter. We use unicorn hairs, phoenix tail feathers and the heartstrings of dragons. No two Ollivander wands are the same, just as no two unicorns, dragons or phoenixes are quite the same. And of course, you will never get such good results with another wizard’s wand.’

Harry suddenly realised that the tape measure, which was measuring between his nostrils, was doing this on its own. Mr Ollivander was flitting around the shelves, taking down boxes.

‘That will do,’ he said, and the tape measure crumpled into a heap on the floor. ‘Right then, Mr Potter. Try this one. Beechwood and dragon heartstring. Nine inches. Nice and flexible. Just take it and give it a wave.’

Harry took the wand and (feeling foolish) waved it around a

bit, but Mr Ollivander snatched it out of his hand almost at once.

'Maple and phoenix feather. Seven inches. Quite whippy. Try –'

Harry tried – but he had hardly raised the wand when it, too, was snatched back by Mr Ollivander.

'No, no – here, ebony and unicorn hair, eight and a half inches, springy. Go on, go on, try it out.'

Harry tried. And tried. He had no idea what Mr Ollivander was waiting for. The pile of tried wands was mounting higher and higher on the spindly chair, but the more wands Mr Ollivander pulled from the shelves, the happier he seemed to become.

'Tricky customer, eh? Not to worry, we'll find the perfect match here somewhere – I wonder, now – yes, why not – unusual combination – holly and phoenix feather, eleven inches, nice and supple.'

Harry took the wand. He felt a sudden warmth in his fingers. He raised the wand above his head, brought it swishing down through the dusty air and a stream of red and gold sparks shot from the end like a firework, throwing dancing spots of light on to the walls. Hagrid whooped and clapped and Mr Ollivander cried, 'Oh, bravo! Yes, indeed, oh, very good. Well, well, well ... how curious ... how very curious ...'

He put Harry's wand back into its box and wrapped it in brown paper, still muttering, 'Curious ... curious ...'

'Sorry,' said Harry, 'but *what's* curious?'

Mr Ollivander fixed Harry with his pale stare.

'I remember every wand I've ever sold, Mr Potter. Every single wand. It so happens that the phoenix whose tail feather is in your wand, gave another feather – just one other. It is very curious indeed that you should be destined for this wand when its brother – why, its brother gave you that scar.'

Harry swallowed.

'Yes, thirteen and a half inches. Yew. Curious indeed how these things happen. The wand chooses the wizard, remember ... I think we must expect great things from you, Mr Potter ... After all, He Who Must Not Be Named did great things – terrible, yes, but great.'

Harry shivered. He wasn't sure he liked Mr Ollivander too much. He paid seven gold Galleons for his wand and Mr Ollivander bowed them from his shop.

*

The late-afternoon sun hung low in the sky as Harry and Hagrid made their way back down Diagon Alley, back through the wall,

back through the Leaky Cauldron, now empty. Harry didn't speak at all as they walked down the road; he didn't even notice how much people were gawping at them on the Underground, laden as they were with all their funny-shaped packages, with the sleeping snowy owl on Harry's lap. Up another escalator, out into Paddington station; Harry only realised where they were when Hagrid tapped him on the shoulder.

'Got time fer a bite to eat before yer train leaves,' he said.

He bought Harry a hamburger and they sat down on plastic seats to eat them. Harry kept looking around. Everything looked so strange, somehow.

'You all right, Harry? Yer very quiet,' said Hagrid.

Harry wasn't sure he could explain. He'd just had the best birthday of his life – and yet – he chewed his hamburger, trying to find the words.

'Everyone thinks I'm special,' he said at last. 'All those people in the Leaky Cauldron, Professor Quirrell, Mr Ollivander ... but I don't know anything about magic at all. How can they expect great things? I'm famous and I can't even remember what I'm famous for. I don't know what happened when Vol- sorry – I mean, the night my parents died.'

Hagrid leant across the table. Behind the wild beard and eyebrows he wore a very kind smile.

'Don' you worry, Harry. You'll learn fast enough. Everyone starts at the beginning at Hogwarts, you'll be just fine. Just be yerself. I know it's hard. Yeh've been singled out, an' that's always hard. But yeh'll have a great time at Hogwarts – I did – still do, 'smatter of fact.'

Hagrid helped Harry on to the train that would take him back to the Dursleys, then handed him an envelope.

'Yer ticket fer Hogwarts,' he said. 'First o' September – King's Cross – it's all on yer ticket. Any problems with the Dursleys, send me a letter with yer owl, she'll know where to find me ... See yeh soon, Harry.'

The train pulled out of the station. Harry wanted to watch Hagrid until he was out of sight; he rose in his seat and pressed his nose against the window, but he blinked and Hagrid had gone.

The Journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters

Harry's last month with the Dursleys wasn't fun. True, Dudley was now so scared of Harry he wouldn't stay in the same room, while Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon didn't shut Harry in his cupboard, force him to do anything or shout at him – in fact, they didn't speak to him at all. Half-terrified, half-furious, they acted as though any chair with Harry in it was empty. Although this was an improvement in many ways, it did become a bit depressing after a while.

Harry kept to his room, with his new owl for company. He had decided to call her Hedwig, a name he had found in *A History of Magic*. His school books were very interesting. He lay on his bed reading late into the night, Hedwig swooping in and out of the open window as she pleased. It was lucky that Aunt Petunia didn't come in to Hoover any more, because Hedwig kept bringing back dead mice. Every night before he went to sleep, Harry ticked off another day on the piece of paper he had pinned to the wall, counting down to September the first.

On the last day of August he thought he'd better speak to his aunt and uncle about getting to King's Cross station next day, so he went down to the living-room, where they were watching a quiz show on television. He cleared his throat to let them know he was there, and Dudley screamed and ran from the room.

'Er – Uncle Vernon?'

Uncle Vernon grunted to show he was listening.

'Er – I need to be at King's Cross tomorrow to – to go to Hogwarts.'

Uncle Vernon grunted again.

'Would it be all right if you gave me a lift?'

Grunt. Harry supposed that meant yes.

‘Thank you.’

He was about to go back upstairs when Uncle Vernon actually spoke.

‘Funny way to get to a wizards’ school, the train. Magic carpets all got punctures, have they?’

Harry didn’t say anything.

‘Where is this school, anyway?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Harry, realising this for the first time. He pulled the ticket Hagrid had given him out of his pocket.

‘I just take the train from platform nine and three-quarters at eleven o’clock,’ he read.

His aunt and uncle stared.

‘Platform what?’

‘Nine and three-quarters.’

‘Don’t talk rubbish,’ said Uncle Vernon, ‘there is no platform nine and three-quarters.’

‘It’s on my ticket.’

‘Barking,’ said Uncle Vernon, ‘howling mad, the lot of them. You’ll see. You just wait. All right, we’ll take you to King’s Cross. We’re going up to London tomorrow anyway, or I wouldn’t bother.’

‘Why are you going to London?’ Harry asked, trying to keep things friendly.

‘Taking Dudley to hospital,’ growled Uncle Vernon. ‘Got to have that ruddy tail removed before he goes to Smeltings.’

*

Harry woke at five o’clock the next morning and was too excited and nervous to go back to sleep. He got up and pulled on his jeans because he didn’t want to walk into the station in his wizard’s robes – he’d change on the train. He checked his Hogwarts list yet again to make sure he had everything he needed, saw that Hedwig was shut safely in her cage and then paced the room, waiting for the Dursleys to get up. Two hours later, Harry’s huge, heavy trunk had been loaded into the Dursleys’ car, Aunt Petunia had talked Dudley into sitting next to Harry and they had set off.

They reached King’s Cross at half past ten. Uncle Vernon dumped Harry’s trunk on to a trolley and wheeled it into the station for him. Harry thought this was strangely kind until Uncle Vernon stopped dead, facing the platforms with a nasty grin on his face.

‘Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine – platform ten. Your platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don’t seem to have built it yet, do they?’

He was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one next to it, and in the middle, nothing at all.

‘Have a good term,’ said Uncle Vernon with an even nastier smile. He left without another word. Harry turned and saw the Dursleys drive away. All three of them were laughing. Harry’s mouth went rather dry. What on earth was he going to do? He was starting to attract a lot of funny looks, because of Hedwig. He’d have to ask someone.

He stopped a passing guard, but didn’t dare mention platform nine and three-quarters. The guard had never heard of Hogwarts and when Harry couldn’t even tell him what part of the country it was in, he started to get annoyed, as though Harry was being stupid on purpose. Getting desperate, Harry asked for the train that left at eleven o’clock, but the guard said there wasn’t one. In the end the guard strode away, muttering about time-wasters. Harry was now trying hard not to panic. According to the large clock over the arrivals board, he had ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it; he was stranded in the middle of a station with a trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard money and a large owl.

Hagrid must have forgotten to tell him something you had to do, like tapping the third brick on the left to get into Diagon Alley. He wondered if he should get out his wand and start tapping the ticket box between platforms nine and ten.

At that moment a group of people passed just behind him and he caught a few words of what they were saying.

‘– packed with Muggles, of course –’

Harry swung round. The speaker was a plump woman who was talking to four boys, all with flaming red hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like Harry’s in front of him – and they had an owl.

Heart hammering, Harry pushed his trolley after them. They stopped and so did he, just near enough to hear what they were saying.

‘Now, what’s the platform number?’ said the boys’ mother.

‘Nine and three-quarters!’ piped a small girl, also red-headed,

who was holding her hand. 'Mum, can't I go ...'

'You're not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet. All right, Percy, you go first.'

What looked like the oldest boy marched towards platforms nine and ten. Harry watched, careful not to blink in case he missed it – but just as the boy reached the divide between the two platforms, a large crowd of tourists came swarming in front of him, and by the time the last rucksack had cleared away, the boy had vanished.

'Fred, you next,' the plump woman said.

'I'm not Fred, I'm George,' said the boy. 'Honestly, woman, call yourself our mother? Can't you *tell* I'm George?'

'Sorry, George, dear.'

'Only joking, I am Fred,' said the boy, and off he went. His twin called after him to hurry up, and he must have done, because a second later, he had gone – but how had he done it?

Now the third brother was walking briskly towards the ticket barrier – he was almost there – and then, quite suddenly, he wasn't anywhere.

There was nothing else for it.

'Excuse me,' Harry said to the plump woman.

'Hullo, dear,' she said. 'First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new, too.'

She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet and a long nose.

'Yes,' said Harry. 'The thing is – the thing is, I don't know how to –'

'How to get on to the platform?' she said kindly, and Harry nodded.

'Not to worry,' she said. 'All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron.'

'Er – OK,' said Harry.

He pushed his trolley round and stared at the barrier. It looked very solid.

He started to walk towards it. People jostled him on their way to platforms nine and ten. Harry walked more quickly. He was going to smash right into that ticket box and then he'd be in trouble – leaning forward on his trolley he broke into a heavy

run – the barrier was coming nearer and nearer – he wouldn't be able to stop – the trolley was out of control – he was a foot away – he closed his eyes ready for the crash –

It didn't come ... he kept on running ... he opened his eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said *Hogwarts Express, 11 o'clock*. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the ticket box had been, with the words *Platform Nine and Three-Quarters* on it. He had done it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every colour wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to each other in a disgruntled sort of way over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks.

The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. Harry pushed his trolley off down the platform in search of an empty seat. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, 'Gran, I've lost my toad again.'

'Oh, Neville,' he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

'Give us a look, Lee, go on.'

The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry pressed on through the crowd until he found an empty compartment near the end of the train. He put Hedwig inside first and then started to shove and heave his trunk towards the train door. He tried to lift it up the steps but could hardly raise one end and twice he dropped it painfully on his foot.

'Want a hand?' It was one of the red-haired twins he'd followed through the ticket box.

'Yes, please,' Harry panted.

'Oy, Fred! C'mere and help!'

With the twins' help, Harry's trunk was at last tucked away in a corner of the compartment.

'Thanks,' said Harry, pushing his sweaty hair out of his eyes.

'What's that?' said one of the twins suddenly, pointing at Harry's lightning scar.

'Blimey,' said the other twin. 'Are you -?'

'He is,' said the first twin. 'Aren't you?' he added to Harry.

‘What?’ said Harry.

‘*Harry Potter*,’ chorused the twins.

‘Oh, him,’ said Harry. ‘I mean, yes, I am.’

The two boys gawped at him and Harry felt himself going red. Then, to his relief, a voice came floating in through the train’s open door.

‘Fred? George? Are you there?’

‘Coming, Mum.’

With a last look at Harry, the twins hopped off the train.

Harry sat down next to the window where, half-hidden, he could watch the red-haired family on the platform and hear what they were saying. Their mother had just taken out her handkerchief.

‘Ron, you’ve got something on your nose.’

The youngest boy tried to jerk out of the way, but she grabbed him and began rubbing the end of his nose.

‘Mum – geroff.’ He wriggled free.

‘Aaah, has ickle Ronnie got somefink on his nosie?’ said one of the twins.

‘Shut up,’ said Ron.

‘Where’s Percy?’ said their mother.

‘He’s coming now.’

The oldest boy came striding into sight. He had already changed into his billowing black Hogwarts robes and Harry noticed a shiny red and gold badge on his chest with the letter *P* on it.

‘Can’t stay long, Mother,’ he said. ‘I’m up front, the Prefects have got two compartments to themselves –’

‘Oh, are you a *Prefect*, Percy?’ said one of the twins, with an air of great surprise. ‘You should have said something, we had no idea.’

‘Hang on, I think I remember him saying something about it,’ said the other twin. ‘Once –’

‘Or twice –’

‘A minute –’

‘All summer –’

‘Oh, shut up,’ said Percy the Prefect.

‘How come Percy gets new robes, anyway?’ said one of the twins.

‘Because he’s a *Prefect*,’ said their mother fondly. ‘All right, dear, well, have a good term – send me an owl when you get there.’

She kissed Percy on the cheek and he left. Then she turned to the twins.

‘Now, you two – this year, you behave yourselves. If I get one more owl telling me you’ve – you’ve blown up a toilet or –’

‘Blown up a toilet? We’ve never blown up a toilet.’

‘Great idea though, thanks, Mum.’

‘It’s *not* funny. And look after Ron.’

‘Don’t worry, ickle Ronniekins is safe with us.’

‘Shut up,’ said Ron again. He was almost as tall as the twins already and his nose was still pink where his mother had rubbed it.

‘Hey, Mum, guess what? Guess who we just met on the train?’

Harry leant back quickly so they couldn’t see him looking.

‘You know that black-haired boy who was near us in the station? Know who he is?’

‘Who?’

‘*Harry Potter!*’

Harry heard the little girl’s voice.

‘Oh, Mum, can I go on the train and see him, Mum, oh please ...’

‘You’ve already seen him, Ginny, and the poor boy isn’t something you goggle at in a zoo. Is he really, Fred? How do you know?’

‘Asked him. Saw his scar. It’s really there – like lightning.’

‘Poor *dear* – no wonder he was alone. I wondered. He was ever so polite when he asked how to get on to the platform.’

‘Never mind that, do you think he remembers what You-Know-Who looks like?’

Their mother suddenly became very stern.

‘I forbid you to ask him, Fred. No, don’t you dare. As though he needs reminding of that on his first day at school.’

‘All right, keep your hair on.’

A whistle sounded.

‘Hurry up!’ their mother said, and the three boys clambered on to the train. They leant out of the window for her to kiss them goodbye and their younger sister began to cry.

‘Don’t, Ginny, we’ll send you loads of owls.’

‘We’ll send you a Hogwarts toilet seat.’

‘*George!*’

‘Only joking, Mum.’

The train began to move. Harry saw the boys’ mother waving

and their sister, half laughing, half crying, running to keep up with the train until it gathered too much speed; then she fell back and waved.

Harry watched the girl and her mother disappear as the train rounded the corner. Houses flashed past the window. Harry felt a great leap of excitement. He didn't know what he was going to – but it had to be better than what he was leaving behind.

The door of the compartment slid open and the youngest red-headed boy came in.

'Anyone sitting there?' he asked, pointing at the seat opposite Harry. 'Everywhere else is full.'

Harry shook his head and the boy sat down. He glanced at Harry and then looked quickly out of the window, pretending he hadn't looked. Harry saw he still had a black mark on his nose.

'Hey, Ron.'

The twins were back.

'Listen, we're going down the middle of the train – Lee Jordan's got a giant tarantula down there.'

'Right,' mumbled Ron.

'Harry,' said the other twin, 'did we introduce ourselves? Fred and George Weasley. And this is Ron, our brother. See you later, then.'

'Bye,' said Harry and Ron. The twins slid the compartment door shut behind them.

'Are you really Harry Potter?' Ron blurted out.

Harry nodded.

'Oh – well, I thought it might be one of Fred and George's jokes,' said Ron. 'And have you really got – you know ...'

He pointed at Harry's forehead.

Harry pulled back his fringe to show the lightning scar. Ron stared.

'So that's where You-Know-Who –?'

'Yes,' said Harry, 'but I can't remember it.'

'Nothing?' said Ron eagerly.

'Well – I remember a lot of green light, but nothing else.'

'Wow,' said Ron. He sat and stared at Harry for a few moments, then, as though he had suddenly realised what he was doing, he looked quickly out of the window again.

'Are all your family wizards?' asked Harry, who found Ron just as interesting as Ron found him.

‘Er – yes, I think so,’ said Ron. ‘I think Mum’s got a second cousin who’s an accountant, but we never talk about him.’

‘So you must know loads of magic already.’

The Weasleys were clearly one of those old wizarding families the pale boy in Diagon Alley had talked about.

‘I heard you went to live with Muggles,’ said Ron. ‘What are they like?’

‘Horrible – well, not all of them. My aunt and uncle and cousin are, though. Wish I’d had three wizard brothers.’

‘Five,’ said Ron. For some reason, he was looking gloomy. ‘I’m the sixth in our family to go to Hogwarts. You could say I’ve got a lot to live up to. Bill and Charlie have already left – Bill was Head Boy and Charlie was captain of Quidditch. Now Percy’s a Prefect. Fred and George mess around a lot, but they still get really good marks and everyone thinks they’re really funny. Everyone expects me to do as well as the others, but if I do, it’s no big deal, because they did it first. You never get anything new, either, with five brothers. I’ve got Bill’s old robes, Charlie’s old wand and Percy’s old rat.’

Ron reached inside his jacket and pulled out a fat grey rat, which was asleep.

‘His name’s Scabbers and he’s useless, he hardly ever wakes up. Percy got an owl from my dad for being made a Prefect, but they couldn’t aff– I mean, I got Scabbers instead.’

Ron’s ears went pink. He seemed to think he’d said too much, because he went back to staring out of the window.

Harry didn’t think there was anything wrong with not being able to afford an owl. After all, he’d never had any money in his life until a month ago, and he told Ron so, all about having to wear Dudley’s old clothes and never getting proper birthday presents. This seemed to cheer Ron up.

‘... and until Hagrid told me, I didn’t know anything about being a wizard or about my parents or Voldemort –’

Ron gasped.

‘What?’ said Harry.

‘*You said You-Know-Who’s name!*’ said Ron, sounding both shocked and impressed. ‘I’d have thought you, of all people –’

‘I’m not trying to be *brave* or anything, saying the name,’ said Harry. ‘I just never knew you shouldn’t. See what I mean? I’ve got loads to learn ... I bet,’ he added, voicing for the first time

something that had been worrying him a lot lately, 'I bet I'm the worst in the class.'

'You won't be. There's loads of people who come from Muggle families and they learn quick enough.'

While they had been talking, the train had carried them out of London. Now they were speeding past fields full of cows and sheep. They were quiet for a time, watching the fields and lanes flick past.

Around half past twelve there was a great clattering outside in the corridor and a smiling, dimpled woman slid back their door and said, 'Anything off the trolley, dears?'

Harry, who hadn't had any breakfast, leapt to his feet, but Ron's ears went pink again and he muttered that he'd brought sandwiches. Harry went out into the corridor.

He had never had any money for sweets with the Dursleys and now that he had pockets rattling with gold and silver he was ready to buy as many Mars Bars as he could carry – but the woman didn't have Mars Bars. What she did have were Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans, Drooble's Best Blowing Gum, Chocolate Frogs, Pumpkin Pasties, Cauldron Cakes, Liquorice Wands and a number of other strange things Harry had never seen in his life. Not wanting to miss anything, he got some of everything and paid the woman eleven silver Sickles and seven bronze Knuts.

Ron stared as Harry brought it all back into the compartment and tipped it on to an empty seat.

'Hungry, are you?'

'Starving,' said Harry, taking a large bite out of a pumpkin pasty.

Ron had taken out a lumpy package and unwrapped it. There were four sandwiches in there. He pulled one of them apart and said, 'She always forgets I don't like corned beef.'

'Swap you for one of these,' said Harry, holding up a pasty. 'Go on –'

'You don't want this, it's all dry,' said Ron. 'She hasn't got much time,' he added quickly, 'you know, with five of us.'

'Go on, have a pasty,' said Harry, who had never had anything to share before or, indeed, anyone to share it with. It was a nice feeling, sitting there with Ron, eating their way through all Harry's pasties and cakes (the sandwiches lay forgotten).

'What are these?' Harry asked Ron, holding up a pack of

Chocolate Frogs. ‘They’re not *really* frogs, are they?’ He was starting to feel that nothing would surprise him.

‘No,’ said Ron. ‘But see what the card is, I’m missing Agrippa.’

‘What?’

‘Oh, of course, you wouldn’t know – Chocolate Frogs have cards inside them, you know, to collect – Famous Witches and Wizards. I’ve got about five hundred, but I haven’t got Agrippa or Ptolemy.’

Harry unwrapped his Chocolate Frog and picked up the card. It showed a man’s face. He wore half-moon glasses, had a long crooked nose and flowing silver hair, beard and moustache. Underneath the picture was the name *Albus Dumbledore*.

‘So *this* is Dumbledore!’ said Harry.

‘Don’t tell me you’d never heard of Dumbledore!’ said Ron. ‘Can I have a frog? I might get Agrippa – thanks –’

Harry turned over his card and read:

Albus Dumbledore, currently Headmaster of Hogwarts. Considered by many the greatest wizard of modern times, Professor Dumbledore is particularly famous for his defeat of the dark wizard Grindelwald in 1945, for the discovery of the twelve uses of dragon’s blood and his work on alchemy with his partner, Nicolas Flamel. Professor Dumbledore enjoys chamber music and tenpin bowling.

Harry turned the card back over and saw, to his astonishment, that Dumbledore’s face had disappeared.

‘He’s gone!’

‘Well, you can’t expect him to hang around all day,’ said Ron. ‘He’ll be back. No, I’ve got Morgana again and I’ve got about six of her ... do you want it? You can start collecting.’

Ron’s eyes strayed to the pile of Chocolate Frogs waiting to be unwrapped.

‘Help yourself,’ said Harry. ‘But in, you know, the Muggle world, people just stay put in photos.’

‘Do they? What, they don’t move at all?’ Ron sounded amazed. ‘*Weird!*’

Harry stared as Dumbledore sidled back into the picture on his card and gave him a small smile. Ron was more interested in

eating the frogs than looking at the Famous Witches and Wizards cards, but Harry couldn't keep his eyes off them. Soon he had not only Dumbledore and Morgana, but Hengist of Woodcroft, Alberic Grunnion, Circe, Paracelsus and Merlin. He finally tore his eyes away from the druidess Clidna, who was scratching her nose, to open a bag of Bertie Bott's Every-Flavour Beans.

'You want to be careful with those,' Ron warned Harry. 'When they say every flavour, they *mean* every flavour – you know, you get all the ordinary ones like chocolate and peppermint and marmalade, but then you can get spinach and liver and tripe. George reckons he had a bogey-flavoured one once.'

Ron picked up a green bean, looked at it carefully and bit into a corner.

'Bleaaargh – see? Sprouts.'

They had a good time eating the Every-Flavour Beans. Harry got toast, coconut, baked bean, strawberry, curry, grass, coffee, sardine and was even brave enough to nibble the end off a funny grey one Ron wouldn't touch, which turned out to be pepper.

The countryside now flying past the window was becoming wilder. The neat fields had gone. Now there were woods, twisting rivers and dark green hills.

There was a knock on the door of their compartment and the round-faced boy Harry had passed on platform nine and three-quarters came in. He looked tearful.

'Sorry,' he said, 'but have you seen a toad at all?'

When they shook their heads, he wailed, 'I've lost him! He keeps getting away from me!'

'He'll turn up,' said Harry.

'Yes,' said the boy miserably. 'Well, if you see him ...'

He left.

'Don't know why he's so bothered,' said Ron. 'If I'd brought a toad I'd lose it as quick as I could. Mind you, I brought Scabbers, so I can't talk.'

The rat was still snoozing on Ron's lap.

'He might have died and you wouldn't know the difference,' said Ron in disgust. 'I tried to turn him yellow yesterday to make him more interesting, but the spell didn't work. I'll show you, look ...'

He rummaged around in his trunk and pulled out a very battered-looking wand. It was chipped in places and something

white was glinting at the end.

‘Unicorn hair’s nearly poking out. Anyway –’

He had just raised his wand when the compartment door slid open again. The toadless boy was back, but this time he had a girl with him. She was already wearing her new Hogwarts robes.

‘Has anyone seen a toad? Neville’s lost one,’ she said. She had a bossy sort of voice, lots of bushy brown hair and rather large front teeth.

‘We’ve already told him we haven’t seen it,’ said Ron, but the girl wasn’t listening, she was looking at the wand in his hand.

‘Oh, are you doing magic? Let’s see it, then.’

She sat down. Ron looked taken aback.

‘Er – all right.’

He cleared his throat.

‘Sunshine, daisies, butter mellow,

Turn this stupid, fat rat yellow.’

He waved his wand, but nothing happened. Scabbers stayed grey and fast asleep.

‘Are you sure that’s a real spell?’ said the girl. ‘Well, it’s not very good, is it? I’ve tried a few simple spells just for practice and it’s all worked for me. Nobody in my family’s magic at all, it was ever such a surprise when I got my letter, but I was ever so pleased, of course, I mean, it’s the very best school of witchcraft there is, I’ve heard – I’ve learnt all our set books off by heart, of course, I just hope it will be enough – I’m Hermione Granger, by the way, who are you?’

She said all this very fast.

Harry looked at Ron and was relieved to see by his stunned face that he hadn’t learnt all the set books off by heart either.

‘I’m Ron Weasley,’ Ron muttered.

‘Harry Potter,’ said Harry.

‘Are you really?’ said Hermione. ‘I know all about you, of course – I got a few extra books for background reading, and you’re in *Modern Magical History* and *The Rise and Fall of the Dark Arts* and *Great Wizarding Events of the Twentieth Century*.

‘Am I?’ said Harry, feeling dazed.

‘Goodness, didn’t you know, I’d have found out everything I could if it was me,’ said Hermione. ‘Do either of you know what house you’ll be in? I’ve been asking around and I hope I’m in Gryffindor, it sounds by far the best, I hear Dumbledore himself

was one, but I suppose Ravenclaw wouldn't be too bad ... Anyway, we'd better go and look for Neville's toad. You two had better change, you know, I expect we'll be there soon.'

And she left, taking the toadless boy with her.

'Whatever house I'm in, I hope she's not in it,' said Ron. He threw his wand back into his trunk. 'Stupid spell – George gave it to me, bet he knew it was a dud.'

'What house are your brothers in?' asked Harry.

'Gryffindor,' said Ron. Gloom seemed to be settling on him again. 'Mum and Dad were in it, too. I don't know what they'll say if I'm not. I don't suppose Ravenclaw *would* be too bad, but imagine if they put me in Slytherin.'

'That's the house Vol– I mean, You-Know-Who was in?'

'Yeah,' said Ron. He flopped back into his seat, looking depressed.

'You know, I think the ends of Scabbers's whiskers are a bit lighter,' said Harry, trying to take Ron's mind off houses. 'So what do your oldest brothers do now they've left, anyway?'

Harry was wondering what a wizard did once he'd finished school.

'Charlie's in Romania studying dragons and Bill's in Africa doing something for Gringotts,' said Ron. 'Did you hear about Gringotts? It's been all over the *Daily Prophet*, but I don't suppose you get that with the Muggles – someone tried to rob a high-security vault.'

Harry stared.

'Really? What happened to them?'

'Nothing, that's why it's such big news. They haven't been caught. My dad says it must've been a powerful Dark wizard to get round Gringotts, but they don't think they took anything, that's what's odd. 'Course, everyone gets scared when something like this happens in case You-Know-Who's behind it.'

Harry turned this news over in his mind. He was starting to get a prickle of fear every time You-Know-Who was mentioned. He supposed this was all part of entering the magical world, but it had been a lot more comfortable saying 'Voldemort' without worrying.

'What's your Quidditch team?' Ron asked.

'Er – I don't know any,' Harry confessed.

'What!' Ron looked dumbfounded. 'Oh, you wait, it's the best

game in the world –’ And he was off, explaining all about the four balls and the positions of the seven players, describing famous games he’d been to with his brothers and the broomstick he’d like to get if he had the money. He was just taking Harry through the finer points of the game when the compartment door slid open yet again, but it wasn’t Neville the toadless boy or Hermione Granger this time.

Three boys entered and Harry recognised the middle one at once: it was the pale boy from Madam Malkin’s robe shop. He was looking at Harry with a lot more interest than he’d shown back in Diagon Alley.

‘Is it true?’ he said. ‘They’re saying all down the train that Harry Potter’s in this compartment. So it’s you, is it?’

‘Yes,’ said Harry. He was looking at the other boys. Both of them were thickset and looked extremely mean. Standing either side of the pale boy they looked like bodyguards.

‘Oh, this is Crabbe and this is Goyle,’ said the pale boy carelessly, noticing where Harry was looking. ‘And my name’s Malfoy, Draco Malfoy.’

Ron gave a slight cough, which might have been hiding a snigger. Draco Malfoy looked at him.

‘Think my name’s funny, do you? No need to ask who you are. My father told me all the Weasleys have red hair, freckles and more children than they can afford.’

He turned back to Harry.

‘You’ll soon find out some wizarding families are much better than others, Potter. You don’t want to go making friends with the wrong sort. I can help you there.’

He held out his hand to shake Harry’s, but Harry didn’t take it.

‘I think I can tell who the wrong sort are for myself, thanks,’ he said coolly.

Draco Malfoy didn’t go red, but a pink tinge appeared in his pale cheeks.

‘I’d be careful if I were you, Potter,’ he said slowly. ‘Unless you’re a bit politer you’ll go the same way as your parents. They didn’t know what was good for them, either. You hang around with riff-raff like the Weasleys and that Hagrid and it’ll rub off on you.’

Both Harry and Ron stood up. Ron’s face was as red as his hair.

‘Say that again,’ he said.

‘Oh, you’re going to fight us, are you?’ Malfoy sneered.

‘Unless you get out now,’ said Harry, more bravely than he felt, because Crabbe and Goyle were a lot bigger than him or Ron.

‘But we don’t feel like leaving, do we, boys? We’ve eaten all our food and you still seem to have some.’

Goyle reached towards the Chocolate Frogs next to Ron – Ron leapt forward, but before he’d so much as touched Goyle, Goyle let out a horrible yell.

Scabbers the rat was hanging off his finger, sharp little teeth sunk deep into Goyle’s knuckle – Crabbe and Malfoy backed away as Goyle swung Scabbers round and round, howling, and when Scabbers finally flew off and hit the window, all three of them disappeared at once. Perhaps they thought there were more rats lurking among the sweets, or perhaps they’d heard footsteps, because a second later, Hermione Granger had come in.

‘What *has* been going on?’ she said, looking at the sweets all over the floor and Ron picking up Scabbers by his tail.

‘I think he’s been knocked out,’ Ron said to Harry. He looked closer at Scabbers. ‘No – I don’t believe it – he’s gone back to sleep.’

And so he had.

‘You’ve met Malfoy before?’

Harry explained about their meeting in Diagon Alley.

‘I’ve heard of his family,’ said Ron darkly. ‘They were some of the first to come back to our side after You-Know-Who disappeared. Said they’d been bewitched. My dad doesn’t believe it. He says Malfoy’s father didn’t need an excuse to go over to the Dark Side.’ He turned to Hermione. ‘Can we help you with something?’

‘You’d better hurry up and put your robes on, I’ve just been up the front to ask the driver and he says we’re nearly there. You haven’t been fighting, have you? You’ll be in trouble before we even get there!’

‘Scabbers has been fighting, not us,’ said Ron, scowling at her. ‘Would you mind leaving while we change?’

‘All right – I only came in here because people outside are behaving very childishly, racing up and down the corridors,’ said Hermione in a sniffy voice. ‘And you’ve got dirt on your nose, by the way, did you know?’

Ron glared at her as she left. Harry peered out of the window. It was getting dark. He could see mountains and forests under a

deep-purple sky. The train did seem to be slowing down.

He and Ron took off their jackets and pulled on their long black robes. Ron's were a bit short for him, you could see his trainers underneath them.

A voice echoed through the train: 'We will be reaching Hogwarts in five minutes' time. Please leave your luggage on the train, it will be taken to the school separately.'

Harry's stomach lurched with nerves and Ron, he saw, looked pale under his freckles. They crammed their pockets with the last of the sweets and joined the crowd thronging the corridor.

The train slowed right down and finally stopped. People pushed their way towards the door and out on to a tiny, dark platform. Harry shivered in the cold night air. Then a lamp came bobbing over the heads of the students and Harry heard a familiar voice: 'Firs'-years! Firs'-years over here! All right there, Harry?'

Hagrid's big hairy face beamed over the sea of heads.

'C'mon, follow me – any more firs'-years? Mind yer step, now! Firs'-years follow me!'

Slipping and stumbling, they followed Hagrid down what seemed to be a steep, narrow path. It was so dark either side of them that Harry thought there must be thick trees there. Nobody spoke much. Neville, the boy who kept losing his toad, sniffed once or twice.

'Yeh'll get yer firs' sight o' Hogwarts in a sec,' Hagrid called over his shoulder, 'jus' round this bend here.'

There was a loud 'Ooooooh!'

The narrow path had opened suddenly on to the edge of a great black lake. Perched atop a high mountain on the other side, its windows sparkling in the starry sky, was a vast castle with many turrets and towers.

'No more'n four to a boat!' Hagrid called, pointing to a fleet of little boats sitting in the water by the shore. Harry and Ron were followed into their boat by Neville and Hermione.

'Everyone in?' shouted Hagrid, who had a boat to himself, 'Right then – FORWARD!'

And the fleet of little boats moved off all at once, gliding across the lake, which was as smooth as glass. Everyone was silent, staring up at the great castle overhead. It towered over them as they sailed nearer and nearer to the cliff on which it stood.

'Heads down!' yelled Hagrid as the first boats reached the cliff;

they all bent their heads and the little boats carried them through a curtain of ivy which hid a wide opening in the cliff face. They were carried along a dark tunnel, which seemed to be taking them right underneath the castle, until they reached a kind of underground harbour, where they clambered out on to rocks and pebbles.

‘Oy, you there! Is this your toad?’ said Hagrid, who was checking the boats as people climbed out of them.

‘Trevor!’ cried Neville blissfully, holding out his hands. Then they clambered up a passageway in the rock after Hagrid’s lamp, coming out at last on to smooth, damp grass right in the shadow of the castle.

They walked up a flight of stone steps and crowded around the huge, oak front door.

‘Everyone here? You there, still got yer toad?’

Hagrid raised a gigantic fist and knocked three times on the castle door.

The Sorting Hat

The door swung open at once. A tall, black-haired witch in emerald-green robes stood there. She had a very stern face and Harry's first thought was that this was not someone to cross.

'The first-years, Professor McGonagall,' said Hagrid.

'Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here.'

She pulled the door wide. The Entrance Hall was so big you could have fitted the whole of the Dursleys' house in it. The stone walls were lit with flaming torches like the ones at Gringotts, the ceiling was too high to make out, and a magnificent marble staircase facing them led to the upper floors.

They followed Professor McGonagall across the flagged stone floor. Harry could hear the drone of hundreds of voices from a doorway to the right – the rest of the school must already be here – but Professor McGonagall showed the first-years into a small empty chamber off the hall. They crowded in, standing rather closer together than they would usually have done, peering about nervously.

'Welcome to Hogwarts,' said Professor McGonagall. 'The start-of-term banquet will begin shortly, but before you take your seats in the Great Hall, you will be sorted into your houses. The Sorting is a very important ceremony because, while you are here, your house will be something like your family within Hogwarts. You will have classes with the rest of your house, sleep in your house dormitory and spend free time in your house common room.'

'The four houses are called Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin. Each house has its own noble history and each has produced outstanding witches and wizards. While you are at Hogwarts, your triumphs will earn your house points, while any rule-breaking will lose house points. At the end of the year, the house with the most points is awarded the House Cup, a great

honour. I hope each of you will be a credit to whichever house becomes yours.

‘The Sorting Ceremony will take place in a few minutes in front of the rest of the school. I suggest you all smarten yourselves up as much as you can while you are waiting.’

Her eyes lingered for a moment on Neville’s cloak, which was fastened under his left ear, and on Ron’s smudged nose. Harry nervously tried to flatten his hair.

‘I shall return when we are ready for you,’ said Professor McGonagall. ‘Please wait quietly.’

She left the chamber. Harry swallowed.

‘How exactly do they sort us into houses?’ he asked Ron.

‘Some sort of test, I think. Fred said it hurts a lot, but I think he was joking.’

Harry’s heart gave a horrible jolt. A test? In front of the whole school? But he didn’t know any magic yet – what on earth would he have to do? He hadn’t expected something like this the moment they arrived. He looked around anxiously and saw that everyone else looked terrified too. No one was talking much except Hermione Granger, who was whispering very fast about all the spells she’d learnt and wondering which one she’d need. Harry tried hard not to listen to her. He’d never been more nervous, never, not even when he’d had to take a school report home to the Dursleys saying that he’d somehow turned his teacher’s wig blue. He kept his eyes fixed on the door. Any second now, Professor McGonagall would come back and lead him to his doom.

Then something happened which made him jump about a foot in the air – several people behind him screamed.

‘What the –?’

He gasped. So did the people around him. About twenty ghosts had just streamed through the back wall. Pearly-white and slightly transparent, they glided across the room talking to each other and hardly glancing at the first-years. They seemed to be arguing. What looked like a fat little monk was saying, ‘Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give him a second chance –’

‘My dear Friar, haven’t we given Peeves all the chances he deserves? He gives us all a bad name and you know, he’s not really even a ghost – I say, what are you all doing here?’

A ghost wearing a ruff and tights had suddenly noticed the

first-years.

Nobody answered.

‘New students!’ said the Fat Friar, smiling around at them. ‘About to be sorted, I suppose?’

A few people nodded mutely.

‘Hope to see you in Hufflepuff!’ said the Friar. ‘My old house, you know.’

‘Move along now,’ said a sharp voice. ‘The Sorting Ceremony’s about to start.’

Professor McGonagall had returned. One by one, the ghosts floated away through the opposite wall.

‘Now, form a line,’ Professor McGonagall told the first-years, ‘and follow me.’

Feeling oddly as though his legs had turned to lead, Harry got into line behind a boy with sandy hair, with Ron behind him, and they walked out of the chamber, back across the hall and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall.

Harry had never even imagined such a strange and splendid place. It was lit by thousands and thousands of candles which were floating in mid-air over four long tables, where the rest of the students were sitting. These tables were laid with glittering golden plates and goblets. At the top of the Hall was another long table where the teachers were sitting. Professor McGonagall led the first-years up here, so that they came to a halt in a line facing the other students, with the teachers behind them. The hundreds of faces staring at them looked like pale lanterns in the flickering candlelight. Dotted here and there among the students, the ghosts shone misty silver. Mainly to avoid all the staring eyes, Harry looked upwards and saw a velvety black ceiling dotted with stars. He heard Hermione whisper, ‘It’s bewitched to look like the sky outside, I read about it in *Hogwarts: A History*.’

It was hard to believe there was a ceiling there at all, and that the Great Hall didn’t simply open on to the heavens.

Harry quickly looked down again as Professor McGonagall silently placed a four-legged stool in front of the first-years. On top of the stool she put a pointed wizard’s hat. This hat was patched and frayed and extremely dirty. Aunt Petunia wouldn’t have let it in the house.

Maybe they had to try and get a rabbit out of it, Harry thought wildly, that seemed the sort of thing – noticing that everyone in

the Hall was now staring at the hat, he stared at it too. For a few seconds, there was complete silence. Then the hat twitched. A rip near the brim opened wide like a mouth – and the hat began to sing:

*'Oh, you may not think I'm pretty,
But don't judge on what you see,
I'll eat myself if you can find
A smarter hat than me.
You can keep your bowlers black,
Your top hats sleek and tall,
For I'm the Hogwarts Sorting Hat
And I can cap them all.
There's nothing hidden in your head
The Sorting Hat can't see,
So try me on and I will tell you
Where you ought to be.
You might belong in Gryffindor,
Where dwell the brave at heart,
Their daring, nerve and chivalry
Set Gryffindors apart;
You might belong in Hufflepuff,
Where they are just and loyal,
Those patient Hufflepuffs are true
And unafraid of toil;
Or yet in wise old Ravenclaw,
If you've a ready mind,
Where those of wit and learning,
Will always find their kind;
Or perhaps in Slytherin
You'll make your real friends,
Those cunning folk use any means
To achieve their ends.
So put me on! Don't be afraid!
And don't get in a flap!
You're in safe hands (though I have none)
For I'm a Thinking Cap!'*

The whole Hall burst into applause as the hat finished its song. It bowed to each of the four tables and then became quite still again.

‘So we’ve just got to try on the hat!’ Ron whispered to Harry. ‘I’ll kill Fred, he was going on about wrestling a troll.’

Harry smiled weakly. Yes, trying on the hat was a lot better than having to do a spell, but he did wish they could have tried it on without everyone watching. The hat seemed to be asking rather a lot; Harry didn’t feel brave or quick-witted or any of it at the moment. If only the hat had mentioned a house for people who felt a bit queasy, that would have been the one for him.

Professor McGonagall now stepped forward holding a long roll of parchment.

‘When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted,’ she said. ‘Abbott, Hannah!’

A pink-faced girl with blonde pigtails stumbled out of line, put on the hat, which fell right down over her eyes, and sat down. A moment’s pause –

‘HUFFLEPUFF!’ shouted the hat.

The table on the right cheered and clapped as Hannah went to sit down at the Hufflepuff table. Harry saw the ghost of the Fat Friar waving merrily at her.

‘Bones, Susan!’

‘HUFFLEPUFF!’ shouted the hat again, and Susan scuttled off to sit next to Hannah.

‘Boot, Terry!’

‘RAVENCLAW!’

The table second from the left clapped this time; several Ravenclaws stood up to shake hands with Terry as he joined them.

‘Brocklehurst, Mandy’ went to Ravenclaw too, but ‘Brown, Lavender’ became the first new Gryffindor and the table on the far left exploded with cheers; Harry could see Ron’s twin brothers catcalling.

‘Bulstrode, Millicent’ then became a Slytherin. Perhaps it was Harry’s imagination, after all he’d heard about Slytherin, but he thought they looked an unpleasant lot.

He was starting to feel definitely sick now. He remembered being picked for teams during sports lessons at his old school. He had always been last to be chosen, not because he was no good, but because no one wanted Dudley to think they liked him.

‘Finch-Fletchley, Justin!’

‘HUFFLEPUFF!’

Sometimes, Harry noticed, the hat shouted out the house at once, but at others it took a little while to decide. 'Finnigan, Seamus', the sandy-haired boy next to Harry in the line, sat on the stool for almost a whole minute before the hat declared him a Gryffindor.

'Granger, Hermione!'

Hermione almost ran to the stool and jammed the hat eagerly on her head.

'GRYFFINDOR!' shouted the hat. Ron groaned.

A horrible thought struck Harry, as horrible thoughts always do when you're very nervous. What if he wasn't chosen at all? What if he just sat there with the hat over his eyes for ages, until Professor McGonagall jerked it off his head and said there had obviously been a mistake and he'd better get back on the train?

When Neville Longbottom, the boy who kept losing his toad, was called, he fell over on his way to the stool. The hat took a long time to decide with Neville. When it finally shouted 'GRYFFINDOR', Neville ran off still wearing it, and had to jog back amid gales of laughter to give it to 'MacDougal, Morag'.

Malfoy swaggered forward when his name was called and got his wish at once: the hat had barely touched his head when it screamed, 'SLYTHERIN!'

Malfoy went to join his friends Crabbe and Goyle, looking pleased with himself.

There weren't many people left now.

'Moon' ... 'Nott' ... 'Parkinson' ... then a pair of twin girls, 'Patil' and 'Patil' ... then 'Perks, Sally-Anne' ... and then, at last –

'Potter, Harry!'

As Harry stepped forward, whispers suddenly broke out like little hissing fires all over the hall.

'Potter, did she say?'

'The Harry Potter?'

The last thing Harry saw before the hat dropped over his eyes was the Hall full of people craning to get a good look at him. Next second he was looking at the black inside of the hat. He waited.

'Hmm,' said a small voice in his ear. 'Difficult. Very difficult. Plenty of courage, I see. Not a bad mind, either. There's talent, oh my goodness, yes – and a nice thirst to prove yourself, now that's interesting ... So where shall I put you?'

Harry gripped the edges of the stool and thought, 'Not

Slytherin, not Slytherin.'

'Not Slytherin, eh?' said the small voice. 'Are you sure? You could be great, you know, it's all here in your head, and Slytherin will help you on the way to greatness, no doubt about that – no? Well, if you're sure – better be GRYFFINDOR!'

Harry heard the hat shout the last word to the whole Hall. He took off the hat and walked shakily towards the Gryffindor table. He was so relieved to have been chosen and not put in Slytherin, he hardly noticed that he was getting the loudest cheer yet. Percy the Prefect got up and shook his hand vigorously, while the Weasley twins yelled, 'We got Potter! We got Potter!' Harry sat down opposite the ghost in the ruff he'd seen earlier. The ghost patted his arm, giving Harry the sudden, horrible feeling he'd just plunged it into a bucket of ice-cold water.

He could see the High Table properly now. At the end nearest him sat Hagrid, who caught his eye and gave him the thumbs-up. Harry grinned back. And there, in the centre of the High Table, in a large gold chair, sat Albus Dumbledore. Harry recognised him at once from the card he'd got out of the Chocolate Frog on the train. Dumbledore's silver hair was the only thing in the whole Hall that shone as brightly as the ghosts. Harry spotted Professor Quirrell, too, the nervous young man from the Leaky Cauldron. He was looking very peculiar in a large purple turban.

And now there were only three people left to be sorted. 'Turpin, Lisa' became a Ravenclaw and then it was Ron's turn. He was pale green by now. Harry crossed his fingers under the table and a second later the hat had shouted, 'GRYFFINDOR!'

Harry clapped loudly with the rest as Ron collapsed into the chair next to him.

'Well done, Ron, excellent,' said Percy Weasley pompously across Harry as 'Zabini, Blaise' was made a Slytherin. Professor McGonagall rolled up her scroll and took the Sorting Hat away.

Harry looked down at his empty gold plate. He had only just realised how hungry he was. The pumpkin pasties seemed ages ago.

Albus Dumbledore had got to his feet. He was beaming at the students, his arms opened wide, as if nothing could have pleased him more than to see them all there.

'Welcome!' he said. 'Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And

here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!

‘Thank you!’

He sat back down. Everybody clapped and cheered. Harry didn’t know whether to laugh or not.

‘Is he – a bit mad?’ he asked Percy uncertainly.

‘Mad?’ said Percy airily. ‘He’s a genius! Best wizard in the world! But he is a bit mad, yes. Potatoes, Harry?’

Harry’s mouth fell open. The dishes in front of him were now piled with food. He had never seen so many things he liked to eat on one table: roast beef, roast chicken, pork chops and lamb chops, sausages, bacon and steak, boiled potatoes, roast potatoes, chips, Yorkshire pudding, peas, carrots, gravy, ketchup and, for some strange reason, mint humbugs.

The Dursleys had never exactly starved Harry, but he’d never been allowed to eat as much as he liked. Dudley had always taken anything that Harry really wanted, even if it made him sick. Harry piled his plate with a bit of everything except the humbugs and began to eat. It was all delicious.

‘That does look good,’ said the ghost in the ruff sadly, watching Harry cut up his steak.

‘Can’t you –?’

‘I haven’t eaten for nearly five hundred years,’ said the ghost. ‘I don’t need to, of course, but one does miss it. I don’t think I’ve introduced myself? Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington at your service. Resident ghost of Gryffindor Tower.’

‘I know who you are!’ said Ron suddenly. ‘My brothers told me about you – you’re Nearly Headless Nick!’

‘I would *prefer* you to call me Sir Nicholas de Mimsy –’ the ghost began stiffly, but sandy-haired Seamus Finnigan interrupted. ‘Nearly Headless? How can you be *nearly* headless?’

Sir Nicholas looked extremely miffed, as if their little chat wasn’t going at all the way he wanted.

‘Like *this*,’ he said irritably. He seized his left ear and pulled. His whole head swung off his neck and fell on to his shoulder as if it was on a hinge. Someone had obviously tried to behead him, but not done it properly. Looking pleased at the stunned looks on their faces, Nearly Headless Nick flipped his head back on to his neck, coughed and said, ‘So – new Gryffindors! I hope you’re going to help us win the House Championship this year? Gryffindor have never gone so long without winning. Slytherin

have got the cup six years in a row! The Bloody Baron's becoming almost unbearable – he's the Slytherin ghost.'

Harry looked over at the Slytherin table and saw a horrible ghost sitting there, with blank staring eyes, a gaunt face and robes stained with silver blood. He was right next to Malfoy who, Harry was pleased to see, didn't look too pleased with the seating arrangements.

'How did he get covered in blood?' asked Seamus with great interest.

'I've never asked,' said Nearly Headless Nick delicately.

When everyone had eaten as much as they could, the remains of the food faded from the plates, leaving them sparkling clean as before. A moment later the puddings appeared. Blocks of ice-cream in every flavour you could think of, apple pies, treacle tarts, chocolate éclairs and jam doughnuts, trifle, strawberries, jelly, rice pudding ...

As Harry helped himself to a treacle tart, the talk turned to their families.

'I'm half and half,' said Seamus. 'Me dad's a Muggle. Mam didn't tell him she was a witch 'til after they were married. Bit of a nasty shock for him.'

The others laughed.

'What about you, Neville?' said Ron.

'Well, my gran brought me up and she's a witch,' said Neville, 'but the family thought I was all Muggle for ages. My great-uncle Algie kept trying to catch me off my guard and force some magic out of me – he pushed me off the end of Blackpool pier once, I nearly drowned – but nothing happened until I was eight. Great-uncle Algie came round for tea and he was hanging me out of an upstairs window by the ankles when my great-auntie Enid offered him a meringue and he accidentally let go. But I bounced – all the way down the garden and into the road. They were all really pleased. Gran was crying, she was so happy. And you should have seen their faces when I got in here – they thought I might not be magic enough to come, you see. Great-uncle Algie was so pleased he bought me my toad.'

On Harry's other side, Percy Weasley and Hermione were talking about lessons ('I *do* hope they start straight away, there's so much to learn, I'm particularly interested in Transfiguration, you know, turning something into something else, of course, it's

supposed to be very difficult –'; 'You'll be starting small, just matches into needles and that sort of thing –').

Harry, who was starting to feel warm and sleepy, looked up at the High Table again. Hagrid was drinking deeply from his goblet. Professor McGonagall was talking to Professor Dumbledore. Professor Quirrell, in his absurd turban, was talking to a teacher with greasy black hair, a hooked nose and sallow skin.

It happened very suddenly. The hook-nosed teacher looked past Quirrell's turban straight into Harry's eyes – and a sharp, hot pain shot across the scar on Harry's forehead.

'Ouch!' Harry clapped a hand to his head.

'What is it?' asked Percy.

'N-nothing.'

The pain had gone as quickly as it had come. Harder to shake off was the feeling Harry had got from the teacher's look – a feeling that he didn't like Harry at all.

'Who's that teacher talking to Professor Quirrell?' he asked Percy.

'Oh, you know Quirrell already, do you? No wonder he's looking so nervous, that's Professor Snape. He teaches Potions, but he doesn't want to – everyone knows he's after Quirrell's job. Knows an awful lot about the Dark Arts, Snape.'

Harry watched Snape for a while but Snape didn't look at him again.

At last, the puddings too disappeared and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The Hall fell silent.

'Ahem – just a few more words now we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you.

'First-years should note that the forest in the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well.'

Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins.

'I have also been asked by Mr Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors.

'Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch.

'And finally, I must tell you that this year, the third-floor

corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death.'

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did.

'He's not serious?' he muttered to Percy.

'Must be,' said Percy, frowning at Dumbledore. 'It's odd, because he usually gives us a reason why we're not allowed to go somewhere – the forest's full of dangerous beasts, everyone knows that. I do think he might have told us Prefects, at least.'

'And now, before we go to bed, let us sing the school song!' cried Dumbledore. Harry noticed that the other teachers' smiles had become rather fixed.

Dumbledore gave his wand a little flick as if he was trying to get a fly off the end and a long golden ribbon flew out of it, which rose high above the tables and twisted itself snake-like into words.

'Everyone pick their favourite tune,' said Dumbledore, 'and off we go!'

And the school bellowed:

*'Hogwarts, Hogwarts, Hoggy Warty Hogwarts,
Teach us something please,
Whether we be old and bald
Or young with scabby knees,
Our heads could do with filling
With some interesting stuff,
For now they're bare and full of air,
Dead flies and bits of fluff,
So teach us things worth knowing,
Bring back what we've forgot,
Just do your best, we'll do the rest,
And learn until our brains all rot.'*

Everybody finished the song at different times. At last, only the Weasley twins were left singing along to a very slow funeral march. Dumbledore conducted their last few lines with his wand, and when they had finished, he was one of those who clapped loudest.

'Ah, music,' he said, wiping his eyes. 'A magic beyond all we do here! And now, bedtime. Off you trot!'

The Gryffindor first-years followed Percy through the chattering crowds, out of the Great Hall and up the marble staircase.

Harry's legs were like lead again, but only because he was so tired and full of food. He was too sleepy even to be surprised that the people in the portraits along the corridors whispered and pointed as they passed, or that twice Percy led them through doorways hidden behind sliding panels and hanging tapestries. They climbed more staircases, yawning and dragging their feet, and Harry was just wondering how much further they had to go when they came to a sudden halt.

A bundle of walking sticks was floating in mid-air ahead of them and as Percy took a step towards 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. 'Tickle 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 armour 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.

'*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 cosy, 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 pyjamas 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.

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 next day. People queuing outside classrooms stood on tiptoe 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 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 armour 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 waste-paper 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 which 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-coloured creature with bulging, lamp-like 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 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 lessons 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 learnt how to take care of all the strange plants and fungi and found out what they were used for.

Easily the most boring lesson was History of Magic, which was the only class 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 lesson he took the register, 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 had sat down in her first class.

‘Transfiguration is some of the most complex and dangerous magic you will learn at Hogwarts,’ she said. ‘Anyone messing around in my class will leave and not come back. You have been warned.’

Then she changed her desk into a pig and back again. They were all very impressed and couldn’t wait to get started, but soon realised they weren’t going to be changing the furniture into animals for a long time. After making a lot of complicated notes, they were each given a match and started trying to turn it into a needle. By the end of the lesson, only Hermione Granger had made any difference to her match; Professor McGonagall showed the class how it had gone all silver and pointy and gave Hermione a rare smile.

The class everyone had really been looking forward to was Defence Against the Dark Arts, but Quirrell’s lessons turned out to be a bit of a joke. His classroom smelled strongly of garlic, which everyone said was to ward off a vampire he’d met in Romania and was afraid would be coming back to get him one of these days. His turban, he told them, had been given to him by an African prince as a thank-you for getting rid of a troublesome zombie, but they weren’t sure they believed this story. For one thing, when Seamus Finnigan asked eagerly to hear how Quirrell had fought off the zombie, Quirrell went pink and started talking about the weather; for another, they had noticed that a funny smell hung around the turban, and the Weasley twins insisted that it was stuffed full of garlic as well, so that Quirrell was protected wherever he went.

Harry was very relieved to find out that he wasn’t miles behind everyone else. Lots of people had come from Muggle families and, like him, hadn’t had any idea that they were witches and wizards. There was so much to learn that even people like Ron didn’t have much of a head start.

Friday was an important day for Harry and Ron. They finally managed to find their way down to the Great Hall for breakfast without getting lost once.

‘What have we got today?’ Harry asked Ron as he poured sugar on his porridge.

‘Double Potions with the Slytherins,’ said Ron. ‘Snape’s Head of

Slytherin house. They say he always favours them – we'll be able to see if it's true.'

'Wish McGonagall favoured us,' said Harry. Professor McGonagall was Head of Gryffindor house, but it hadn't stopped her giving them a huge pile of homework the day before.

Just then, the post arrived. Harry had got used to this by now, but it had given him a bit of a shock on the first morning, when about a hundred owls had suddenly streamed into the Great Hall during breakfast, circling the tables until they saw their owners and dropping letters and packages on to their laps.

Hedwig hadn't brought Harry anything so far. She sometimes flew in to nibble his ear and have a bit of toast before going off to sleep in the owlery with the other school owls. This morning, however, she fluttered down between the marmalade and the sugar bowl and dropped a note on to Harry's plate. Harry tore it open at once.

Dear Harry, (it said, in a very untidy scrawl)

I know you get Friday afternoons off, so would you like to come and have a cup of tea with me around three? I want to hear all about your first week. Send us an answer back with Hedwig.
Hagrid

Harry borrowed Ron's quill, scribbled 'Yes, please, see you later' on the back of the note and sent Hedwig off again.

It was lucky that Harry had tea with Hagrid to look forward to, because the Potions lesson turned out to be the worst thing that had happened to him so far.

At the start-of-term banquet, Harry had got the idea that Professor Snape disliked him. By the end of the first Potions lesson, he knew he'd been wrong. Snape didn't dislike Harry – he *hated* him.

Potions lessons took place down in one of the dungeons. It was colder here than up in the main castle and would have been quite creepy enough without the pickled animals floating in glass jars all around the walls.

Snape, like Flitwick, started the class by taking the register, and like Flitwick, he paused at Harry's name.

'Ah, yes,' he said softly, 'Harry Potter. Our new – *celebrity*.'

Draco Malfoy and his friends Crabbe and Goyle sniggered

behind their hands. Snape finished calling the names and looked up at the class. His eyes were black like Hagrid's, but they had none of Hagrid's warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.

'You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making,' he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper, but they caught every word – like Professor McGonagall, Snape had the gift of keeping a class silent without effort. 'As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses ... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death – if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.'

More silence followed this little speech. Harry and Ron exchanged looks with raised eyebrows. Hermione Granger was on the edge of her seat and looked desperate to start proving that she wasn't a dunderhead.

'Potter!' said Snape suddenly. 'What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?'

Powdered root of what to an infusion of what? Harry glanced at Ron, who looked as stumped as he was; Hermione's hand had shot into the air.

'I don't know, sir,' said Harry.

Snape's lips curled into a sneer.

'Tut, tut – fame clearly isn't everything.'

He ignored Hermione's hand.

'Let's try again. Potter, where would you look if I told you to find me a bezoar?'

Hermione stretched her hand as high into the air as it would go without her leaving her seat, but Harry didn't have the faintest idea what a bezoar was. He tried not to look at Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle, who were shaking with laughter.

'I don't know, sir.'

'Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming, eh, Potter?'

Harry forced himself to keep looking straight into those cold eyes. He *had* looked through his books at the Dursleys', but did Snape expect him to remember everything in *One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi*?

Snape was still ignoring Hermione's quivering hand.

'What is the difference, Potter, between monkshood and wolfsbane?'

At this, Hermione stood up, her hand stretching towards the dungeon ceiling.

'I don't know,' said Harry quietly. 'I think Hermione does, though, why don't you try her?'

A few people laughed; Harry caught Seamus's eye and Seamus winked. Snape, however, was not pleased.

'Sit down,' he snapped at Hermione. 'For your information, Potter, asphodel and wormwood make a sleeping potion so powerful it is known as the Draught of Living Death. A bezoar is a stone taken from the stomach of a goat and it will save you from most poisons. As for monkshood and wolfsbane, they are the same plant, which also goes by the name of aconite. Well? Why aren't you all copying that down?'

There was a sudden rummaging for quills and parchment. Over the noise, Snape said, 'And a point will be taken from Gryffindor house for your cheek, Potter.'

Things didn't improve for the Gryffindors as the Potions lesson continued. Snape put them all into pairs and set them to mixing up a simple potion to cure boils. He swept around in his long black cloak, watching them weigh dried nettles and crush snake fangs, criticising almost everyone except Malfoy, whom he seemed to like. He was just telling everyone to look at the perfect way Malfoy had stewed his horned slugs when clouds of acid green smoke and a loud hissing filled the dungeon. Neville had somehow managed to melt Seamus's cauldron into a twisted blob and their potion was seeping across the stone floor, burning holes in people's shoes. Within seconds, the whole class were standing on their stools while Neville, who had been drenched in the potion when the cauldron collapsed, moaned in pain as angry red boils sprang up all over his arms and legs.

'Idiot boy!' snarled Snape, clearing the spilled potion away with one wave of his wand. 'I suppose you added the porcupine quills before taking the cauldron off the fire?'

Neville whimpered as boils started to pop up all over his nose.

'Take him up to the hospital wing,' Snape spat at Seamus. Then he rounded on Harry and Ron, who had been working next to Neville.

'You – Potter – why didn't you tell him not to add the quills? Thought he'd make you look good if he got it wrong, did you? That's another point you've lost for Gryffindor.'

This was so unfair that Harry opened his mouth to argue, but Ron kicked him behind their cauldron.

'Don't push it,' he muttered. 'I've heard Snape can turn very nasty.'

As they climbed the steps out of the dungeon an hour later, Harry's mind was racing and his spirits were low. He'd lost two points for Gryffindor in his very first week – *why* did Snape hate him so much?

'Cheer up,' said Ron. 'Snape's always taking points off Fred and George. Can I come and meet Hagrid with you?'

At five to three they left the castle and made their way across the grounds. Hagrid lived in a small wooden house on the edge of the Forbidden Forest. A crossbow and a pair of galoshes were outside the front door.

When Harry knocked they heard a frantic scrabbling from inside and several booming barks. Then Hagrid's voice rang out, saying, '*Back, Fang – back.*'

Hagrid's big hairy face appeared in the crack as he pulled the door open.

'Hang on,' he said. '*Back, Fang.*'

He let them in, struggling to keep a hold on the collar of an enormous black boarhound.

There was only one room inside. Hams and pheasants were hanging from the ceiling, a copper kettle was boiling on the open fire and in a corner stood a massive bed with a patchwork quilt over it.

'Make yerselves at home,' said Hagrid, letting go of Fang, who bounded straight at Ron and started licking his ears. Like Hagrid, Fang was clearly not as fierce as he looked.

'This is Ron,' Harry told Hagrid, who was pouring boiling water into a large teapot and putting rock cakes on to a plate.

'Another Weasley, eh?' said Hagrid, glancing at Ron's freckles. 'I spent half me life chasin' yer twin brothers away from the Forest.'

The rock cakes almost broke their teeth, but Harry and Ron pretended to be enjoying them as they told Hagrid all about their first lessons. Fang rested his head on Harry's knee and drooled all over his robes.

Harry and Ron were delighted to hear Hagrid call Filch 'that old git'.

'An' as fer that cat, Mrs Norris, I'd like ter introduce her to Fang some time. D'yeh know, every time I go up ter the school, she follows me everywhere? Can't get rid of her – Filch puts her up to it.'

Harry told Hagrid about Snape's lesson. Hagrid, like Ron, told Harry not to worry about it, that Snape liked hardly any of the students.

'But he seemed to really *hate* me.'

'Rubbish!' said Hagrid. 'Why should he?'

Yet Harry couldn't help thinking that Hagrid didn't quite meet his eyes when he said that.

'How's yer brother Charlie?' Hagrid asked Ron. 'I liked him a lot – great with animals.'

Harry wondered if Hagrid had changed the subject on purpose. While Ron told Hagrid all about Charlie's work with dragons, Harry picked up a piece of paper that was lying on the table under the tea cosy. It was a cutting from the *Daily Prophet*:

GRINGOTTS BREAK-IN LATEST

Investigations continue into the break-in at Gringotts on 31 July, widely believed to be the work of dark wizards or witches unknown.

Gringotts' goblins today insisted that nothing had been taken. The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied the same day.

'But we're not telling you what was in there, so keep your noses out if you know what's good for you,' said a Gringotts spokesgoblin this afternoon.

Harry remembered Ron telling him on the train that someone had tried to rob Gringotts, but Ron hadn't mentioned the date.

'Hagrid!' said Harry. 'That Gringotts break-in happened on my birthday! It might've been happening while we were there!'

There was no doubt about it, Hagrid definitely didn't meet Harry's eyes this time. He grunted and offered him another rock cake. Harry read the story again. *The vault that was searched had in fact been emptied earlier that same day.* Hagrid had emptied vault seven hundred and thirteen, if you could call it emptying, taking

out that grubby little package. Had that been what the thieves were looking for?

As Harry and Ron walked back to the castle for dinner, their pockets weighed down with rock cakes they'd been too polite to refuse, Harry thought that none of the lessons he'd had so far had given him as much to think about as tea with Hagrid. Had Hagrid collected that package just in time? Where was it now? And did Hagrid know something about Snape that he didn't want to tell Harry?

The Midnight Duel

Harry had never believed he would meet a boy he hated more than Dudley, but that was before he met Draco Malfoy. Still, first-year Gryffindors only had Potions with the Slytherins, so they didn't have to put up with Malfoy much. Or at least, they didn't until they spotted a notice pinned up in the Gryffindor common room which made them all groan. Flying lessons would be starting on Thursday – and Gryffindor and Slytherin would be learning together.

'Typical,' said Harry darkly. 'Just what I always wanted. To make a fool of myself on a broomstick in front of Malfoy.'

He had been looking forward to learning to fly more than anything else.

'You don't know you'll make a fool of yourself,' said Ron reasonably. 'Anyway, I know Malfoy's always going on about how good he is at Quidditch, but I bet that's all talk.'

Malfoy certainly did talk about flying a lot. He complained loudly about first-years never getting in the house Quidditch teams and told long, boastful stories which always seemed to end with him narrowly escaping Muggles in helicopters. He wasn't the only one, though: the way Seamus Finnigan told it, he'd spent most of his childhood zooming around the countryside on his broomstick. Even Ron would tell anyone who'd listen about the time he'd almost hit a hang-glider on Charlie's old broom. Everyone from wizarding families talked about Quidditch constantly. Ron had already had a big argument with Dean Thomas, who shared their dormitory, about football. Ron couldn't see what was exciting about a game with only one ball where no one was allowed to fly. Harry had caught Ron prodding Dean's poster of West Ham football team, trying to make the players move.

Neville had never been on a broomstick in his life, because his

grandmother had never let him near one. Privately, Harry felt she'd had good reason, because Neville managed to have an extraordinary number of accidents even with both feet on the ground.

Hermione Granger was almost as nervous about flying as Neville was. This was something you couldn't learn by heart out of a book – not that she hadn't tried. At breakfast on Thursday she bored them all stupid with flying tips she'd got out of a library book called *Quidditch through the Ages*. Neville was hanging on to her every word, desperate for anything that might help him hang on to his broomstick later, but everybody else was very pleased when Hermione's lecture was interrupted by the arrival of the post.

Harry hadn't had a single letter since Hagrid's note, something that Malfoy had been quick to notice, of course. Malfoy's eagle owl was always bringing him packages of sweets from home, which he opened gloatingly at the Slytherin table.

A barn owl brought Neville a small package from his grandmother. He opened it excitedly and showed them a glass ball the size of a large marble, which seemed to be full of white smoke.

'It's a Remembrall!' he explained. 'Gran knows I forget things – this tells you if there's something you've forgotten to do. Look, you hold it tight like this and if it turns red – oh ...' His face fell, because the Remembrall had suddenly glowed scarlet, '... you've forgotten something ...'

Neville was trying to remember what he'd forgotten when Draco Malfoy, who was passing the Gryffindor table, snatched the Remembrall out of his hand.

Harry and Ron jumped to their feet. They were half hoping for a reason to fight Malfoy, but Professor McGonagall, who could spot trouble quicker than any teacher in the school, was there in a flash.

'What's going on?'

'Malfoy's got my Remembrall, Professor.'

Scowling, Malfoy quickly dropped the Remembrall back on the table.

'Just looking,' he said, and he sloped away with Crabbe and Goyle behind him.

*

At three-thirty that afternoon, Harry, Ron and the other Gryffindors hurried down the front steps into the grounds for

their first flying lesson. It was a clear, breezy day and the grass rippled under their feet as they marched down the sloping lawns towards a smooth lawn on the opposite side of the grounds to the Forbidden Forest, whose trees were swaying darkly in the distance.

The Slytherins were already there, and so were twenty broomsticks lying in neat lines on the ground. Harry had heard Fred and George Weasley complain about the school brooms, saying that some of them started to vibrate if you flew too high, or always flew slightly to the left.

Their teacher, Madam Hooch, arrived. She had short, grey hair and yellow eyes like a hawk.

‘Well, what are you all waiting for?’ she barked. ‘Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on, hurry up.’

Harry glanced down at his broom. It was old and some of the twigs stuck out at odd angles.

‘Stick out your right hand over your broom,’ called Madam Hooch at the front, ‘and say, “Up!”’

‘UP!’ everyone shouted.

Harry’s broom jumped into his hand at once, but it was one of the few that did. Hermione Granger’s had simply rolled over on the ground and Neville’s hadn’t moved at all. Perhaps brooms, like horses, could tell when you were afraid, thought Harry; there was a quaver in Neville’s voice that said only too clearly that he wanted to keep his feet on the ground.

Madam Hooch then showed them how to mount their brooms without sliding off the end, and walked up and down the rows, correcting their grips. Harry and Ron were delighted when she told Malfoy he’d been doing it wrong for years.

‘Now, when I blow my whistle, you kick off from the ground, hard,’ said Madam Hooch. ‘Keep your brooms steady, rise a few feet and then come straight back down by leaning forwards slightly. On my whistle – three – two –’

But Neville, nervous and jumpy and frightened of being left on the ground, pushed off hard before the whistle had touched Madam Hooch’s lips.

‘Come back, boy!’ she shouted, but Neville was rising straight up like a cork shot out of a bottle – twelve feet – twenty feet. Harry saw his scared white face look down at the ground falling away, saw him gasp, slip sideways off the broom and –

WHAM – a thud and a nasty crack and Neville lay, face down,

on the grass in a heap. His broomstick was still rising higher and higher and started to drift lazily towards the Forbidden Forest and out of sight.

Madam Hooch was bending over Neville, her face as white as his.

'Broken wrist,' Harry heard her mutter. 'Come on, boy – it's all right, up you get.'

She turned to the rest of the class.

'None of you is to move while I take this boy to the hospital wing! You leave those brooms where they are or you'll be out of Hogwarts before you can say "Quidditch". Come on, dear.'

Neville, his face tear-streaked, clutching his wrist, hobbled off with Madam Hooch, who had her arm around him.

No sooner were they out of earshot than Malfoy burst into laughter.

'Did you see his face, the great lump?'

The other Slytherins joined in.

'Shut up, Malfoy,' snapped Parvati Patil.

'Ooh, sticking up for Longbottom?' said Pansy Parkinson, a hard-faced Slytherin girl. 'Never thought *you'd* like fat little cry babies, Parvati.'

'Look!' said Malfoy, darting forward and snatching something out of the grass. 'It's that stupid thing Longbottom's gran sent him.'

The Remembrall glittered in the sun as he held it up.

'Give that here, Malfoy,' said Harry quietly. Everyone stopped talking to watch.

Malfoy smiled nastily.

'I think I'll leave it somewhere for Longbottom to collect – how about – up a tree?'

'Give it *here!*' Harry yelled, but Malfoy had leapt on to his broomstick and taken off. He hadn't been lying, he *could* fly well – hovering level with the topmost branches of an oak he called, 'Come and get it, Potter!'

Harry grabbed his broom.

'*No!*' shouted Hermione Granger. 'Madam Hooch told us not to move – you'll get us all into trouble.'

Harry ignored her. Blood was pounding in his ears. He mounted the broom and kicked hard against the ground and up, up he soared, air rushed through his hair and his robes whipped out

behind him – and in a rush of fierce joy he realised he'd found something he could do without being taught – this was easy, this was *wonderful*. He pulled his broomstick up a little to take it even higher and heard screams and gasps of girls back on the ground and an admiring whoop from Ron.

He turned his broomstick sharply to face Malfoy in mid-air. Malfoy looked stunned.

'Give it here,' Harry called, 'or I'll knock you off that broom!'

'Oh, yeah?' said Malfoy, trying to sneer, but looking worried.

Harry knew, somehow, what to do. He leant forward and grasped the broom tightly in both hands and it shot towards Malfoy like a javelin. Malfoy only just got out of the way in time; Harry made a sharp about turn and held the broom steady. A few people below were clapping.

'No Crabbe and Goyle up here to save your neck, Malfoy,' Harry called.

The same thought seemed to have struck Malfoy.

'Catch it if you can, then!' he shouted, and he threw the glass ball high into the air and streaked back towards the ground.

Harry saw, as though in slow motion, the ball rise up in the air and then start to fall. He leant forward and pointed his broom handle down – next second he was gathering speed in a steep dive, racing the ball – wind whistled in his ears, mingled with the screams of people watching – he stretched out his hand – a foot from the ground he caught it, just in time to pull his broom straight, and he toppled gently on to the grass with the Remembrall clutched safely in his fist.

'HARRY POTTER!'

His heart sank faster than he'd just dived. Professor McGonagall was running towards them. He got to his feet, trembling.

'Never – in all my time at Hogwarts –'

Professor McGonagall was almost speechless with shock, and her glasses flashed furiously, '– how *dare* you – might have broken your neck –'

'It wasn't his fault, Professor –'

'Be quiet, Miss Patil –'

'But Malfoy –'

'That's *enough*, Mr Weasley. Potter, follow me, now.'

Harry caught sight of Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle's triumphant

faces as he left, walking numbly in Professor McGonagall's wake as she strode towards the castle. He was going to be expelled, he just knew it. He wanted to say something to defend himself, but there seemed to be something wrong with his voice. Professor McGonagall was sweeping along without even looking at him; he had to jog to keep up. Now he'd done it. He hadn't even lasted two weeks. He'd be packing his bags in ten minutes. What would the Dursleys say when he turned up on the doorstep?

Up the front steps, up the marble staircase inside, and still Professor McGonagall didn't say a word to him. She wrenched open doors and marched along corridors with Harry trotting miserably behind her. Maybe she was taking him to Dumbledore. He thought of Hagrid, expelled but allowed to stay on as gamekeeper. Perhaps he could be Hagrid's assistant. His stomach twisted as he imagined it, watching Ron and the others becoming wizards while he stumped around the grounds, carrying Hagrid's bag.

Professor McGonagall stopped outside a classroom. She opened the door and poked her head inside.

'Excuse me, Professor Flitwick, could I borrow Wood for a moment?'

Wood? thought Harry, bewildered; was Wood a cane she was going to use on him?

But Wood turned out to be a person, a burly fifth-year boy who came out of Flitwick's class looking confused.

'Follow me, you two,' said Professor McGonagall, and they marched on up the corridor, Wood looking curiously at Harry.

'In here.'

Professor McGonagall pointed them into a classroom which was empty except for Peeves, who was busy writing rude words on the blackboard.

'Out, Peeves!' she barked. Peeves threw the chalk into a bin, which clanged loudly, and he swooped out cursing. Professor McGonagall slammed the door behind him and turned to face the two boys.

'Potter, this is Oliver Wood. Wood – I've found you a Seeker.'

Wood's expression changed from puzzlement to delight.

'Are you serious, Professor?'

'Absolutely,' said Professor McGonagall crisply. 'The boy's a natural. I've never seen anything like it. Was that your first time on a broomstick, Potter?'