

Harry Potter

*and the
Prisoner of Azkaban*



J.K. ROWLING

BLOOMSBURY

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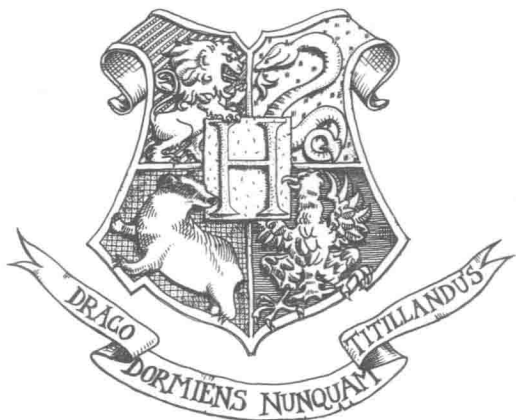
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Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Harry Potter

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*To Jill Prewett and Aine Kiely,
the Godmothers of Swing*

— CHAPTER ONE —

Owl Post

Harry Potter was a highly unusual boy in many ways. For one thing, he hated the summer holidays more than any other time of year. For another, he really wanted to do his homework, but was forced to do it in secret, in the dead of night. And he also happened to be a wizard.

It was nearly midnight, and he was lying on his front in bed, the blankets drawn right over his head like a tent, a torch in one hand and a large leather-bound book (*A History of Magic*, by Bathilda Bagshot) propped open against the pillow. Harry moved the tip of his eagle-feather quill down the page, frowning as he looked for something that would help him write his essay, 'Witch-Burning in the Fourteenth Century Was Completely Pointless – discuss'.

The quill paused at the top of a likely-looking paragraph. Harry pushed his round glasses up his nose, moved his torch closer to the book and read:

Non-magic people (more commonly known as Muggles) were particularly afraid of magic in medieval times, but not very good at recognising

it. On the rare occasion that they did catch a real witch or wizard, burning had no effect whatsoever. The witch or wizard would perform a basic Flame-Freezing Charm and then pretend to shriek with pain while enjoying a gentle, tickling sensation. Indeed, Wendelin the Weird enjoyed being burnt so much that she allowed herself to be caught no fewer than forty-seven times in various disguises.

Harry put his quill between his teeth and reached underneath his pillow for his ink bottle and a roll of parchment. Slowly and very carefully he unscrewed the ink bottle, dipped his quill into it and began to write, pausing every now and then to listen, because if any of the Dursleys heard the scratching of his quill on their way to the bathroom, he'd probably find himself locked in the cupboard under the stairs for the rest of the summer.

The Dursley family of number four, Privet Drive, was the reason that Harry never enjoyed his summer holidays. Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and their son, Dudley, were Harry's only living relatives. They were Muggles, and they had a very medieval attitude towards magic. Harry's dead parents, who had been a witch and wizard themselves, were never mentioned under the Dursleys' roof. For years, Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon had hoped that if they kept Harry as downtrodden as possible, they would be able to squash the magic out of him. To their fury, they had been unsuccessful, and now lived in terror of anyone finding out that Harry had spent most of the last two years at Hogwarts School

of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The most the Dursleys could do these days was to lock away Harry's spellbooks, wand, cauldron and broomstick at the start of the summer holidays, and forbid him to talk to the neighbours.

This separation from his spellbooks had been a real problem for Harry, because his teachers at Hogwarts had given him a lot of holiday work. One of the essays, a particularly nasty one about Shrinking Potions, was for Harry's least favourite teacher, Professor Snape, who would be delighted to have an excuse to give Harry detention for a month. Harry had therefore seized his chance in the first week of the holidays. While Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia and Dudley had gone out into the front garden to admire Uncle Vernon's new company car (in very loud voices, so that the rest of the street would notice it too), Harry had crept downstairs, picked the lock on the cupboard under the stairs, grabbed some of his books and hidden them in his bedroom. As long as he didn't leave spots of ink on the sheets, the Dursleys need never know that he was studying magic by night.

Harry was keen to avoid trouble with his aunt and uncle at the moment, as they were already in a bad mood with him, all because he'd received a telephone call from a fellow wizard one week into the school holidays.

Ron Weasley, who was one of Harry's best friends at Hogwarts, came from a whole family of wizards. This meant that he knew a lot of things Harry didn't, but had never used a telephone before. Most unluckily, it had been Uncle Vernon who had

answered the call.

‘Vernon Dursley speaking.’

Harry, who happened to be in the room at the time, froze as he heard Ron’s voice answer.

‘HELLO? HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME? I – WANT – TO – TALK – TO – HARRY – POTTER!’

Ron was yelling so loudly that Uncle Vernon jumped and held the receiver a foot away from his ear, staring at it with an expression of mingled fury and alarm.

‘WHO IS THIS?’ he roared in the direction of the mouthpiece. ‘WHO ARE YOU?’

‘RON – WEASLEY!’ Ron bellowed back, as though he and Uncle Vernon were speaking from opposite ends of a football pitch. ‘I’M – A – FRIEND – OF – HARRY’S – FROM – SCHOOL –’

Uncle Vernon’s small eyes swivelled around to Harry, who was rooted to the spot.

‘THERE IS NO HARRY POTTER HERE!’ he roared, now holding the receiver at arm’s length, as though frightened it might explode. ‘I DON’T KNOW WHAT SCHOOL YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT! NEVER CONTACT ME AGAIN! DON’T YOU COME NEAR MY FAMILY!’

And he threw the receiver back onto the telephone as if dropping a poisonous spider.

The row that had followed had been one of the worst ever.

‘HOW DARE YOU GIVE THIS NUMBER TO PEOPLE LIKE – PEOPLE LIKE YOU!’ Uncle Vernon had roared, spraying Harry with spit.

Ron obviously realised that he’d got Harry into trouble, because he hadn’t called again. Harry’s

other best friend from Hogwarts, Hermione Granger, hadn't been in touch either. Harry suspected that Ron had warned Hermione not to call, which was a pity, because Hermione, the cleverest witch in Harry's year, had Muggle parents, knew perfectly well how to use a telephone, and would probably have had enough sense not to say that she went to Hogwarts.

So Harry had had no word from any of his wizarding friends for five long weeks, and this summer was turning out to be almost as bad as the last one. There was just one, very small improvement: after swearing that he wouldn't use her to send letters to any of his friends, Harry had been allowed to let his owl, Hedwig, out at night. Uncle Vernon had given in because of the racket Hedwig made if she was locked in her cage all the time.

Harry finished writing about Wendelin the Weird and paused to listen again. The silence in the dark house was broken only by the distant, grunting snores of his enormous cousin, Dudley. It must be very late. Harry's eyes were itching with tiredness. Perhaps he'd finish this essay tomorrow night ...

He replaced the top of the ink bottle, pulled an old pillowcase from under his bed, put the torch, *A History of Magic*, his essay, quill and ink inside it, got out of bed and hid the lot under a loose floor-board under his bed. Then he stood up, stretched, and checked the time on the luminous alarm clock on his bedside table.

It was one o'clock in the morning. Harry's stomach gave a funny jolt. He had been thirteen years old, without realising it, for a whole hour.

Yet another unusual thing about Harry was how little he looked forward to his birthdays. He had never received a birthday card in his life. The Dursleys had completely ignored his last two birthdays, and he had no reason to suppose they would remember this one.

Harry walked across the dark room, past Hedwig's large, empty cage, to the open window. He leant on the sill, the cool night air pleasant on his face after a long time under the blankets. Hedwig had been absent for two nights now. Harry wasn't worried about her – she'd been gone this long before – but he hoped she'd be back soon. She was the only living creature in this house who didn't flinch at the sight of him.

Harry, though still rather small and skinny for his age, had grown a few inches over the last year. His jet-black hair, however, was just as it always had been: stubbornly untidy, whatever he did to it. The eyes behind his glasses were bright green, and on his forehead, clearly visible through his hair, was a thin scar, shaped like a bolt of lightning.

Of all the unusual things about Harry, this scar was the most extraordinary of all. It was not, as the Dursleys had pretended for ten years, a souvenir of the car crash that had killed Harry's parents, because Lily and James Potter had not died in a car crash. They had been murdered, murdered by the most feared Dark wizard for a hundred years, Lord Voldemort. Harry had escaped from the same attack with nothing more than a scar on his forehead, when Voldemort's curse, instead of killing him, had rebounded upon its originator. Barely

alive, Voldemort had fled ...

But Harry had come face to face with him since at Hogwarts. Remembering their last meeting as he stood at the dark window, Harry had to admit he was lucky even to have reached his thirteenth birthday.

He scanned the starry sky for a sign of Hedwig, perhaps soaring back to him with a dead mouse dangling from her beak, expecting praise. Gazing absently over the rooftops, it was a few seconds before Harry realised what he was seeing.

Silhouetted against the golden moon, and growing larger every moment, was a large, strangely lop-sided creature, and it was flapping in Harry's direction. He stood quite still, watching it sink lower and lower. For a split second, he hesitated, his hand on the window-latch, wondering whether to slam it shut, but then the bizarre creature soared over one of the streetlamps of Privet Drive, and Harry, realising what it was, leapt aside.

Through the window soared three owls, two of them holding up the third, which appeared to be unconscious. They landed with a soft *flump* on Harry's bed, and the middle owl, which was large and grey, keeled right over and lay motionless. There was a large package tied to its legs.

Harry recognised the unconscious owl at once – his name was Errol, and he belonged to the Weasley family. Harry dashed to the bed at once, untied the cords around Errol's legs, took off the parcel and then carried Errol to Hedwig's cage. Errol opened one bleary eye, gave a feeble hoot of thanks, and began to gulp some water.

Harry turned back to the remaining owls. One of them, the large snowy female, was his own Hedwig. She, too, was carrying a parcel, and looked extremely pleased with herself. She gave Harry an affectionate nip with her beak as he removed her burden, then flew across the room to join Errol.

Harry didn't recognise the third owl, a handsome tawny one, but he knew at once where it had come from, because in addition to a third parcel, it was carrying a letter bearing the Hogwarts crest. When Harry relieved this owl of its post it ruffled its feathers importantly, stretched its wings and took off through the window into the night.

Harry sat down on his bed, grabbed Errol's package, ripped off the brown paper and discovered a present wrapped in gold, and his first ever birthday card. Fingers trembling slightly, he opened the envelope. Two pieces of paper fell out – a letter and a newspaper cutting.

The cutting had clearly come out of the wizarding newspaper, the *Daily Prophet*, because the people in the black and white picture were moving. Harry picked up the cutting, smoothed it out and read:

MINISTRY OF MAGIC EMPLOYEE SCOOPS GRAND PRIZE

Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts Office at the Ministry of Magic, has won the annual Daily Prophet Grand Prize Galleon Draw.

A delighted Mr Weasley told the Daily Prophet, 'We will be spending the gold on a summer holiday in Egypt, where our eldest son, Bill,