

Harry Potter:

## There is no such thing as magic

(from: *HARRY POTTER and The Philosopher's Stone* ~ Chapter 2)

His Aunt Petunia was wide awake and it was her sharp voice which made the first noise of the day. 'Up! Get up! Now!'

Harry woke up suddenly. His aunt knocked on the door again.

'Up!' she shrieked. Harry heard her coming towards the kitchen and then the sound of the frying pan being put on the stove. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the dream he had been having. It had been a good one - with a flying motorcycle. He was sure he'd had the same dream before.

His aunt was outside the door again.

'Are you up yet?' she demanded.

'Almost,' said Harry.

'Well, get moving, I want you to tend to the bacon. And don't you dare let it burn, I want everything to be perfect on Duddy's birthday.'

Harry groaned.

'What did you say?' his aunt snapped.

'Nothing, nothing ...'

Dudley's birthday - how could he have forgotten? Harry slowly got out of bed and started getting dressed. He had to pull a spider off one of his socks before he put them on. Harry was used to spiders because his little bedroom under the stairs was full of them.

When he was dressed, he went to the kitchen. The table was almost hidden under all Dudley's birthday gifts. It looked like Dudley had got a new computer, 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 quite fat and hated exercise - unless of course it was punching somebody. Dudley's favourite punching-bag was Harry, but he couldn't often catch him. Harry didn't seem so, but he was very quick.

Perhaps because he lived in dark cupboard, Harry had always been small and skinny for his age. He looked even smaller and skinnier because he only had Dudley's old clothes to wear, and Dudley was much bigger than Harry. Harry had black hair, a thin face, bright-green eyes, and knobbly knees. He wore round glasses held together with tape because Dudley had punched him on the nose so many times. 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 for as long as he could remember. In fact, the first question he could remember asking his aunt was how he had got it.

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

Uncle Vernon came into the kitchen as Harry was turning over the bacon and barked, 'Comb your hair!'

Harry was frying the eggs by the time Dudley arrived in the kitchen. Dudley looked much like Uncle Vernon. He had a large, pink face, not much neck, small, blue eyes and smooth blond hair on his thick, fat head. Harry thought he looked like a pig in a wig.

As Harry served breakfast, Dudley was counting his presents. His face fell. 'Thirty-six,' he said, looking up at his mother and father. 'There are two less than last year.'

'Darling, you haven't counted Auntie Marge's present. Look! It's there under this big one.'

'All right, thirty-seven then,' said Dudley, still getting angry. Harry could feel a Dudley tantrum coming, so he began eating his bacon as fast as possible.

Aunt Petunia obviously sensed danger coming as well, because she quickly added, 'And we'll buy you another two presents today. How's that, popkin? Is that all right?'

Dudley sat down and reached for the nearest gift. 'All right then.'

Uncle Vernon chuckled.

At that moment, the telephone rang. Aunt Petunia answered it while Harry and Uncle Vernon watched Dudley unwrap more gifts. He was ripping the wrapping paper from a gold watch when Aunt Petunia came back. She looked both angry and worried.

'Bad news,' she said. 'Mrs Figg has a broken leg. She can't watch Harry.'

Dudley's face filled with horror but Harry had a moment of hope. On Dudley's birthday every year, his parents would take him and a friend to adventure parks, fast-food restaurants or cinemas. Every year, Harry was left with Mrs Figg, a strange old woman who lived nearby. Harry hated it there. The whole house smelled like rotten cabbage and Mrs Figg forced him to look at photographs of cats.

'What now?' said Aunt Petunia, looking angrily at Harry.

'We might phone Marge,' Uncle Vernon suggested.

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

The Dursleys often talked about Harry in this way, like he wasn't there, or as though he couldn't understand them.

'I guess we could take him to the zoo,' Aunt Petunia suggested.

Dudley started to cry loudly, although he was just pretending. 'I don't ... want him ... t-to come!' Dudley screamed between pretend sobs. 'He always sp-sp-spoils everything!' He gave Harry a nasty grin through the space between his mother's arms.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. 'Oh no, they're here!' said Aunt Petunia frantically. A moment later, Piers Polkiss, Dudley's best friend, walked in. Piers was a skinny boy with the face of a rat. He was usually the one who held boy's arms behind their backs as Dudley punched them. Dudley immediately stopped pretending to cry.

Soon, Harry was on his way to the zoo for the first time in his life. His aunt and uncle had been unable to think of anything to do with him. Still, before they left, Uncle Vernon had talked to Harry very sternly. 'I'm warning you now, boy - any funny business, anything at all - and you'll be back in that cupboard until Christmas.'

'I'm not going to do anything,' Harry pleaded. But Uncle Vernon didn't believe him.

The problem was that strange things always happened around Harry and it was useless telling the Dursleys that he didn't cause.

One time, Aunt Petunia, tired of Harry long messy hair, had taken a pair of scissors and cut his hair as short as she could, leaving only his fringe to hide that horrible his scar. Harry spent a sleepless night imagining school the next morning. He was already laughed at for his broken glasses and baggy clothes.

The next morning, however, he had woke up and found his hair exactly as it had been before Aunt Petunia had cut it off. Unable to explain how it had grown back so quickly, he was kept in his cupboard for a week.

But today, nothing was going to be perfect. It was even okay being with Piers and Dudley because he was spending the day somewhere that wasn't school, his cupboard or Mrs Figg's foul-smelling house.

It was a sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded. 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.

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. It had no company except stupid people banging their fingers on the glass. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia banging on the door to wake you up. But at least Harry could visit the rest of the house.

Suddenly the snake opened its little eyes. Very slowly, it raised its head and then it winked at Harry.

Harry quickly looked around to see if anyone else saw. They didn't. He looked back and winked at the snake. It looked at Uncle Vernon and Dudley and then gave Harry a look that clearly said: 'I get that all the time.'

'I know, it must be really annoying,' Harry murmured through the glass although he wasn't sure if the snake could understand him.

The snake nodded yes.

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

The snake pointed at a little sign next to the glass with its tail. "Boa Constrictor, Brazil."

'Was it nice there?'

The snake pointed its tail at the sign again. Then Harry saw: This specimen was bred in the zoo.

"So you've never been to Brazil?"

As the snake shook its head, a loud shout coming from behind Harry made both of them jump. 'DUDLEY! MR DURSLEY! LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT IT'S DOING!'

Dudley walked towards them as fast as he could.

'Move, you,' he said, punching Harry in the stomach. Surprised, Harry fell hard onto the floor.

Then suddenly, as Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, it disappeared. The great snake was quickly uncoiling itself, and it slithered out on to the floor. People screamed and started running for the exits.

As the snake slid past him, Harry could almost hear a low, hissing voice say, 'Brazil, here I come ... Thankssss, amigo.'

The reptile house attendant was still in shock. 'The glass?' he kept saying. 'Where did the glass go?'

Embarrassed, the zoo director made Aunt Petunia a cup of tea while he apologised again and again. Although the snake had only snapped playfully at their heels as it passed, Piers and Dudley were still scared speechless. By the time they were back in the car, Dudley was explaining how it had almost bitten

off his leg. Piers was sworn it had tried to squeeze him to death. But the worst thing of all, for Harry at least, was Piers was able to ask, 'You were talking to it, weren't you, Harry?'

After Piers was safely out of the house, Uncle Vernon moved his focus to Harry. He was so angry he could barely speak. But at last he managed, 'Go - cupboard - stay - no meals!' Then he collapsed into his chair with a large glass of brandy.