CHAPTER FIVE

One Quiet Year

It seemed to Harry that his head had hardly touched the pillow before somebody was shaking him by the shoulder.

'Time to go, Harry, dear,' whispered Mrs Weasley.

She didn't go straight on to Ron. First she pulled the blanket back up round Harry's shoulders, as if he might be allowed another hour after all. Then she smoothed his fringe off his forehead with a warm hand that smelt of soap. Harry lay quite still. He couldn't remember anyone ever doing that. He had no idea what he was meant to do about it. By the time he had thought of something, she had moved away to wake her son.

He groped about on the floor until he found his glasses. He put them on and sat up. Outside the window the sky was still black. Ron was mumbling into his pillow while his mother tried to rouse him. Beyond the end of Harry's mattress, two large, rumpled shapes were heaving themselves up out of a nest of blankets.

''S time already?' said Fred thickly.

There was something folded on top of Harry's trunk that hadn't been there when he went to bed. He picked it up, holding it towards the candle on the windowsill. It was a jumper, thick and soft, knitted in emerald green. Underneath it lay his jeans. They were the oldest pair Dudley had ever handed down to him, the ones he had to roll up three times at the ankle. Somebody had taken them in during the night. His hand went straight to the back pocket. Dracina's letter was still there, folded very small, exactly as he had left it. Whoever had done the sewing had put it back without unfolding it. When he pulled the jeans on, they fitted.

Harry stood still for a moment with his hand on the waistband. Then he pulled the jumper over his head, because that was easier than thinking about it. It was even warmer than the Christmas ones.

Nobody was awake enough to talk. Ron was still sitting on the edge of his bed with his hair on end, staring at something in his lap, when the rest of them gave up waiting for him. Harry, Fred and George shuffled down the stairs, yawning, towards the smell of porridge.

Mrs Weasley was stirring an enormous pot on the stove. Hermione stood beside her, already dressed, her bushy hair tied back. The two of them had their heads very close together. Mr Weasley sat at the kitchen table, counting through a thick bundle of big parchment tickets.

'…twice in one night, dear,' Mrs Weasley was murmuring. 'The second plumber wouldn't even set foot in the kitchen.'

Hermione gave a little gasp of pure delight. Then she saw Harry in the doorway. So did Mrs Weasley.

'Morning, Harry, dear!' said Mrs Weasley brightly. 'I was just telling Hermione about my sink. Sit down, you'll want something hot inside you before that hill.'

‘Six weeks, Molly,’ murmured Mr Weasley, without looking up from his tickets. ‘Right on time.’

‘Arthur.’

‘Sorry, dear.’ Mr Weasley went rather pink. He seemed to be trying very hard not to laugh.

Harry sat down. He couldn’t see what was so funny about a sink.

Mr Weasley put the tickets aside. He stood up, holding his arms out from his sides so that they could all admire his clothes. He had on what seemed to be a golfing jumper, patterned in yellow diamonds. Below it were jeans so old they had gone white at the knees, a size too big for him at least. A broad leather belt was buckled over the top of the lot to keep them up.

‘What d’you think?’ he asked anxiously. ‘We’re supposed to go incognito… do I look like a Muggle, Harry?’

Harry didn’t have the heart to tell him that whilst he did look like a Muggle, like all wizards he looked like a very odd, very conspicuous one. Ordinarily this wouldn’t have been a problem. But after all the things Harry had been seeing and hearing in the Muggle world, he thought he had to say something.

Luckily Hermione was there too. She had been up before any of them. She came over from the stove at once, looking as though she had been waiting for exactly this.

‘It’s very nearly right, Mr Weasley,’ she said kindly. ‘Only Muggles wear their belts under their jumpers, not over the top. They don’t usually pull their jeans up quite so high, either.’

‘Under!’ said Mr Weasley, delighted. He began unbuckling himself at once. ‘Under, of course. You see, Molly? There’s a system to it.’

‘What about me, Hermione, dear?’ said Mrs Weasley, still stirring. ‘For when I take you all to King’s Cross next week. I never know what to put on for the Muggle side of the barrier.’

Hermione considered her. ‘A plain coat would be lovely,’ she said. ‘Just nothing that moves. Or hums.’

‘My hat does not hum.’

‘It does a bit, Mum,’ said George, through an enormous yawn.

Over the top of Mrs Weasley’s head, Hermione caught Harry’s eye. It was only a glance, but Harry knew what it meant. She was worried about them too. The Weasleys were the kindest people either of them knew. They hadn’t the faintest idea what was waiting for them on the other side of the hedge.

While Mr Weasley wrestled with his belt, Harry touched Hermione’s elbow. She followed him without a word into the scullery, where the Wellington boots stood in a muddy row by the back door. The little window above the sink was still black.

‘So,’ said Harry, keeping his voice low. ‘Khan’s having a good summer, isn’t he? D’you reckon I should send him a card? *Congratulations on the Balkans.*’

‘Harry, don’t.’

‘I’m only saying. He’s got half of Yugoslavia. That’s more than Uncle Vernon’s managed with Grunnings.’

‘It isn’t funny.’ Hermione had folded her arms tightly across her chest. ‘It’s the most serious thing that’s happened in the world since the war. Since the *Muggle* war, I mean. The Augments in India alone… do you know how many people they’ve moved out of the cities? Nobody does. The coalition can’t even count them.’

‘I know it isn’t funny,’ said Harry. ‘That’s why I’m joking about it.’

That stopped her. She looked at him properly in the gloom of the scullery, the way she might look at a potion that had gone the wrong colour.

'It's got worse since Friday,' she said, more gently. 'There were twenty thousand of them on Friday night. It was on the radio yesterday morning. Mr Weasley's got an old transistor in his shed, under all the batteries. There are three hundred thousand of them outside the United Nations now. They've been arriving by coach from all over America. There was a man in Ohio who could make the lights flicker. Somebody threw a petrol bomb through his window on Saturday night. He wasn't a metahuman at all, Harry. He was an electrician. His wiring was bad.'

Harry said nothing for a moment. Then he asked the question that had been nagging at him all summer.

'Why've you never talked about any of this? You talk about everything. You talked about the goblin rebellions for a whole train journey once.'

Hermione looked down at her hands.

'Because it's horrible,' she said. 'Harry, all of it, the riots, the machines in America, the camps. Hogwarts is the one place it can't get in. I didn't want to be the one who let it in.' She hesitated. 'The second reason is my parents.'

'What about them?'

'They go to the meetings.' She said it very fast, as though it might hurt less that way. 'Friends of Humanity. Not the marches, nothing like that. Just the meetings in the church hall, on Thursday nights. Dad's got a sticker on the back of the car. It says KEEP BRITAIN HUMAN.'

Harry stared at her. 'But you're a witch.'

‘I know.’ Hermione’s voice wobbled. ‘If anybody in our house is a mutant, it’s me. I can’t understand it. I’ve tried. They don’t see it like that, though. They think magic’s different because it’s in a book with rules. They think I’m *special*.’ She took a breath. ‘They love me, Harry. I know they do. They’d never tell anyone about me, not ever. They’d keep the Statute for my sake if it killed them.’

‘It’d only take one, though, wouldn’t it?’ said Harry. He heard his own voice come out flat. He couldn’t seem to stop it. ‘One Muggle mum who’s fed up with her kitchen catching fire every time her little wizard throws a tantrum. One dad who’s sick of his hair turning green. They see the number on the leaflet. They ring it. Then that’s the Statute gone, with a riot on top.’

Hermione gasped.

‘Harry! That’s a dreadful thing to think! I can’t imagine any parent betraying their own child like that.’

‘I can,’ said Harry quietly.

He was thinking of the cupboard under the stairs. He was thinking of the bars on his bedroom window, of the cat flap in the door, of Aunt Petunia’s lip curling over the word *freak*. He didn’t say any of it. He saw Hermione understand it all at once, as quickly as she understood everything.

She didn’t say anything either. She simply stepped forward, put her arms round him and held on.

Harry was still standing there, rather awkwardly, with his chin in her hair, when Ron came down the stairs and into the kitchen. Harry could see him through the scullery door. Ron was trying to cram a piece of parchment into his back pocket without anybody noticing. It was covered in writing. Whatever Ron was hiding, he wasn’t being nearly subtle enough about it.

Then Ron saw the two of them in the scullery. His ears went pink. He looked very hard at the ceiling.

Harry remembered Dracina's letter. *Now, all of a sudden, she has got the Chudley Cannons.* Of course. Ron's pen pal. It had to be Pansy Parkinson, Chudley Cannons supporter since July, and this must be her answer to whatever Ron had sent off with Pig last night. It had come back very quickly. Pansy must be very keen indeed. Harry thought it was probably some sort of love letter.

Hermione let go of him. Harry tried to sound innocent, without sounding as though he was fishing.

'Morning, Ron,' he said. 'What've you been up to?'

'Nothing,' said Ron at once. 'Been busy.' He backed towards the stairs. 'Er… left something. Back in a minute.'

He was gone before anybody could stop him. They heard him taking the stairs two at a time.

Ron didn't stop until he reached his own room at the top of the house. He shut the door behind him, sat down on his bed under the orange posters and unfolded Pansy's letter. Her handwriting was small, neat and very black. He had got through the first line earlier, before he noticed the others had gone down without him.

Ronald,

Your plan arrived at half past eleven. I read all three pages, which is more than Professor Binns has ever got out of me. The boat one is out of the question. Dracina won't get into a boat. She says boats are for Muggles and Hufflepuffs. PLAN C is worse. We're doing PLAN A, and we are doing it properly.

So here's how. At the top of the Bulgarian end there is a clearing in the wood, past the big pine with the forked trunk. It has a stream, with a fallen tree you can sit on. I found it on Saturday and nobody

goes there. I've hung it with lanterns (fairy ones, so they won't blow out) and I shall see to everything else.

After the match, when everyone is going back to the tents, you will bring Potter. I'll bring her. I shall say I've lost an earring. She will grumble, but she will come, because she always does. Then we leave them. On no account are you to stay and watch.

You are to make sure Potter looks presentable. I know this is a great deal to ask. Do what you can about the hair. You said you had the things. Bring all of them.

Afterwards we shall have to find something to do with ourselves for an hour or so, you and I, so that we don't go blundering back in at the wrong moment. I shall think of something. Mother says it isn't safe for a girl to walk about a campsite on her own after dark. You will have to walk me back to our tent. It is the one with the green silk awning, two rows behind the Malfoys'.

Wear the maroon jumper. It suits you.

Yours,

Pansy

P.S. Burn this. Dracina reads everything.

Ron read it twice. Then he sat back against the wall, impressed. Pansy was brilliant at this. She was like Hermione, he thought, only on his side for once. She'd thought of everything. Fairy lanterns! He would never have thought of fairy lanterns.

He was puzzled by the jumper, though. Nobody had ever told him maroon suited him, least of all himself. In the end he decided it must be for the dark. Maroon would hardly show up at all among the trees. That was clever too. He found it at the bottom of his drawer, under his socks. He pulled it on without a word of complaint.

He supposed *Yours* was just how they signed their letters in Slytherin.

Then he knelt down by his rucksack and checked the things, one by one, for the fourth time since Saturday. They were rolled up in his spare socks. There was a comb he had borrowed from Percy without mentioning it. There was a bottle of Sleekeazy's Hair Potion, which had cost him two weeks' pocket money by owl order. There was a box of the best chocolates Honeydukes made. Last came a sheet of parchment headed THINGS HARRY COULD SAY, nearly all of it crossed out. Only one line had survived. It was the one Ron had come up with himself. *You look nice.* He thought Harry could probably manage that.

He rolled the socks back up very carefully.

It was for Harry's own good, he told himself. Somebody had to do it. Harry would never get round to it on his own, not in a hundred years. He would just go on pretending he couldn't stand her in corridors, then moping about it. Ron owed him. Harry had never once made him feel poor. Harry had shared everything he had with him from the very first day, as though it were nothing. He had snatched Pig out of the air for him on the train. He was the best mate a bloke like Ron could ever have asked for. If that meant one evening in a wood with some fairy lanterns, then Harry was going to have one evening in a wood with some fairy lanterns, whether he liked it or not.

Besides, said a small voice at the back of Ron's head, if Harry was with Dracina, then Hermione would…

Ron's ears went hot. He didn't let the voice finish. He stuffed the letter deep into his pocket. He quite forgot about the P.S.

Down in the scullery, Harry was grinning.

'That was from Pansy,' he murmured. 'Had to be.'

'Do you think so?' said Hermione.

‘Dracina said she’d gone mad about the Cannons all of a sudden. Who else would write back to Ron by four in the morning?’ He shook his head. ‘He’s being dead dense about it, though. Did you see his face? He hasn’t got a clue she fancies him. I’m glad, mind. Somebody ought to fancy Ron. He deserves it more than anybody I know.’ He thought about it. ‘I’ll help him out if I can. From a distance. I’m not going to go poking my nose in.’

It crossed his mind to wonder whether he had ever been that dense himself. A picture came into his head without being asked for: a pair of silver eyes, and the way they had of twinkling at him when they thought nobody was looking. He put it firmly away. No. He had never been as dense as that. It wasn’t the same thing at all.

Hermione was gazing at him. If Harry had been able to see inside her head, which he could not, he would have found her wishing with all her considerable willpower that he would stop being so dense this very minute. She wanted him to claim her, here in the scullery, among the Wellington boots, before the porridge went cold.

‘I’ve always supported you, Harry,’ she said softly. ‘Always. Whatever you wanted. Whatever you decided you wanted.’

She gave him a long, deep look. Then she gave him a smaller, deeper one, in case he had missed the first.

He had missed both.

‘I know,’ said Harry. ‘I’m really grateful, Hermione. You’re a good friend.’

Hermione’s face went very still. Her nostrils flared. Harry, who was looking out of the black window, went straight on without noticing.

‘No, that’s selling you short, that is. I couldn’t do anything without you. I mean it. Who took us back in time for Buckbeak last year? Who brewed Polyjuice Potion in second year, when hardly

anybody in the school could have done it? Who's been working out all the D'ni stuff while the rest of us sat about eating cake? I'd have been dead six times over by now.' He put his hand on her shoulder, the way he did with Ron after a match. 'You're the cleverest person I know. You're brilliant. I can't imagine not having you there. I don't think I could do any of it without you.'

Hermione went pink to the roots of her bushy hair. Harry had meant every word as a friend. Hermione heard something else entirely. She heard her dense, oblivious, impossible Harry admitting yet again that he loved her desperately, only he couldn't quite bring himself to say so.

'You know,' she said, looking down at the hand on her shoulder, 'I think if you love somebody, you ought to tell them. Honestly. Even if it's frightening. Especially if it's frightening. It isn't fair on them otherwise. They might be waiting.'

Harry went red. He was fairly sure he knew who she meant. Hermione and Dracina wrote to each other these days. Dracina must have said something.

'One day,' he said slowly, 'when I've got the courage, I'll tell the woman I love what I feel.' He looked at the window over the sink, where his own reflection looked back. 'It's got to be the right moment, though, hasn't it? I'd have to know she wouldn't hurt me. I can't always tell any more. Not after everything that's happened.'

Hermione took his hand off her shoulder. She held it tightly in both of hers.

'I would never, ever hurt you, Harry,' she said. Her voice shook. 'Never. I know how much those dreadful muggles have hurt you. I know all of it. You mustn't worry about it any more, though. I'm making it all better.'

Behind her shining brown eyes, Hermione was going down a list. It was quite a long one. It had begun at Hogwarts, with a book Madam Pince kept on the top shelf behind her desk, and it had grown all summer. There was a hex that turned the skin inside out, very slowly, an inch a day. There was a jinx that filled the lungs with frogspawn. There was a very old curse indeed, banned in 1612, that made the teeth go on growing until the jaw could no longer close round them. She had copied every one of them into the back of her red leather notebook, under a heading in her neatest handwriting. *For anyone who hurts my Harry.*

'Making what better?' said Harry, puzzled.

'Where're Bill and Charlie and Per-Percy?' said George in the kitchen, yawning hugely.

'Well, they're Apparating, aren't they?' said Mrs Weasley. She hauled the pot across to the table and started slopping porridge into the bowls. 'So they can have a bit of a lie-in. Hermione, dear, would you run up and see if Ginny's stirring? She won't move for me. Harry, sit there, by the stove, it's warmest.'

Hermione squeezed Harry's hand once more, then went. Harry sat where he was told. Mrs Weasley gave him the biggest bowl. Then she poured treacle over it in a thick golden spiral until he could hardly see the porridge underneath.

'Eat up, dear,' she said. 'All of it. You're nothing but elbows.'

Harry knew that Apparating meant vanishing from one place to turn up a moment later somewhere else entirely. He had never known any student at Hogwarts manage it. He had always understood that it was very hard to do.

'So they're still in bed?' said Fred grumpily, dragging his bowl towards him. 'Why can't we Apparate too?'

‘Because you’re not of age and you haven’t passed your test,’ snapped Mrs Weasley. ‘And where have those girls got to?’

Off she went in a bustle of apron. Her footsteps went thumping away up the stairs.

‘You have to pass a test to Apparate?’ Harry asked.

‘Oh yes,’ said Mr Weasley, stowing the tickets safely in his back pocket. ‘The Department of Magical Transportation had to fine a couple of people the other day for Apparating without a licence. It’s not easy, Apparition, and when it’s not done properly it can lead to nasty complications. This pair I’m talking about went and splinched themselves.’

Everyone at the table winced except Harry.

‘Er… splinched?’ said Harry.

‘They left half of themselves behind,’ said Mr Weasley, who was now drowning his own porridge in treacle. ‘Very messy. So, of course, they were stuck. Couldn’t move either way. Had to wait for the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad to sort them out. Meant a fair old bit of paperwork, I can tell you, what with the Muggles who spotted the body parts they’d left behind.’

Hermione had slipped back into the kitchen in time to hear this.

‘Ginny’s coming,’ she whispered to Harry, sitting down beside him. ‘She’s looking for her other sock.’

‘Very hysterical,’ Mr Weasley went on. ‘Those Muggles. At least recently.’ He looked honestly baffled by the whole business, as though Muggles screaming were a sort of weather nobody could explain.

Harry and Hermione looked at each other. They knew exactly why those Muggles had been hysterical.

‘To be fair, Mr Weasley…’ Harry began. He chose his words carefully. ‘Well, I mean, if I was a Muggle and saw bits of people

just lying about, I'd have thought someone was murdered. Especially with all the nonsense going on in the Muggle world right now.'

'Ah, yes. The Muggles have been letting in all kinds of people. It's a real shame. But what can you do.' Mr Weasley shook his head sadly over his porridge. He had missed the point entirely. 'Stands to reason, doesn't it? You let in all sorts of people who don't get on with one another, for one reason or another. Different ways of going on. Different ideas. You pack them all in together on one little island, then everybody's surprised when it ends in tears. Chaos, that's what you get. Fighting in the streets.'

Hermione had gone rigid. Her spoon was halfway to her mouth. She put it down with a click. She drew herself up, two spots of colour burning in her cheeks, and Harry knew that she was about to tell Mr Weasley off for being racist.

'Mostly it's the Germans, from what I gather,' said Mr Weasley confidentially, before she could get a word out. 'They like their rules too much over there. Just asking for a scrap if you ask me. And the French!' He gave a little shudder. 'They smell of garlic, you just can't be in the same room as them.'

Hermione's mouth stayed open. Nothing came out of it. She seemed to have lost track of which part to be cross about first.

Harry sighed. He would tell Mr Weasley one day, he decided, about the people who really were coming to Britain. He would tell him what he had seen on the streets of London with Hagrid, the summer he was eleven. It was one of the only things he had ever agreed with Uncle Vernon about. But he couldn't bear to listen to any more of this conversation, not at half past four in the morning, so he dragged it back to the two wizards who had splinched themselves.

'Were they OK?' he asked loudly.

‘Oh yes,’ said Mr Weasley calmly. ‘But they got a heavy fine, and I don’t think they’ll be trying it again in a hurry. You don’t mess around with Apparition. There are plenty of adult wizards who don’t bother with it. Prefer brooms… slower, but safer.’

‘But Bill and Charlie and Percy can all do it?’

‘Charlie had to take the test twice,’ said Fred, grinning. ‘He failed the first time. Apparated five miles south of where he meant to, right on top of some poor old dear doing her shopping, remember?’

‘Yes, well, he passed the second time,’ said Mrs Weasley, who had come marching back in to a chorus of sniggers.

‘Percy only passed two weeks ago,’ said George. ‘He’s been Apparating downstairs every morning since, just to prove he can.’

There were footsteps in the passage. Ginny came shuffling into the kitchen, pale and bleary, with both socks on at last.

‘Why do we have to be up so early?’ Ginny said, rubbing her eyes as she sat down at the table.

‘We’ve got a bit of a walk,’ said Mr Weasley.

‘Walk?’ said Harry. ‘What, are we walking to the World Cup?’

‘No, no, that’s miles away,’ said Mr Weasley, smiling. ‘We only need to walk a short way. It’s just that it’s very difficult for a large number of wizards to congregate without attracting Muggle attention. And with all the strange trouble going on with Muggles right now, we have to be very careful about how we travel, and on a huge occasion like the Quidditch World Cup…’

‘George!’ said Mrs Weasley sharply. They all jumped.

‘What?’ said George, in an innocent voice that fooled nobody.

‘What is that in your pocket?’

‘Nothing!’

‘Don’t you lie to me!’

Mrs Weasley whipped out her wand and aimed it at George's pocket.

'Accio!' she said.

A handful of small, brightly wrapped objects came zooming out of George's pocket. He snatched at them and missed. They shot straight into Mrs Weasley's outstretched hand.

'We told you to destroy them!' said Mrs Weasley furiously. She held up what were, beyond any doubt, more Ton-Tongue Toffees. 'We told you to get rid of the lot! Empty your pockets, go on, both of you!'

It was not a pleasant scene. The twins had obviously meant to sneak every toffee they could carry past their mother. Only the Summoning Charm could find them all.

'Accio! Accio! Accio!' shouted Mrs Weasley. Toffees came whizzing out of the strangest hiding places. There were toffees in the lining of George's jacket, more in the turn-ups on Fred's jeans.

'We spent six months developing those!' Fred bellowed, as his mother flung them into the bin.

'Oh, a fine way to spend six months!' she shrieked. 'No wonder you didn't get more O.W.L.s!'

All in all, it was not a very friendly departure. Mrs Weasley's face was still thunderous when she kissed her husband goodbye. Even so, the twins looked far crosser than she did. They swung their rucksacks up onto their shoulders. Then they walked out of the door without a word to her.

'Well, have a lovely time,' said Mrs Weasley, 'and behave yourselves,' she called after the twins. Neither of them turned round, or answered.

‘I’ll send Bill, Charlie and Percy along around midday,’ she told her husband. Then she went to the foot of the stairs, drew a deep breath and bellowed. ‘RONALD!’

There was a thump overhead. Ron came clattering down the stairs a few seconds later with his rucksack bouncing on one shoulder. He was very red in the face. He was wearing the maroon jumper.

‘And what,’ said Mrs Weasley, in the voice that had kept seven children in order for over twenty years, ‘have you been doing up there, while your porridge went stone cold?’

‘Nothing,’ said Ron. ‘Had to read a letter.’

Mrs Weasley’s mouth twitched at one corner.

‘Oh?’ she said. ‘Would that be from that pen pal of yours?’

‘I’m entitled to some privacy,’ said Ron, going pinker still. He said nothing more. He went to stand by the door with his hands deep in his pockets, studying the ceiling.

Mrs Weasley turned. She gave Harry a look across the kitchen so knowing that he nearly laughed out loud. He grinned back at her, as wryly as he could manage. So Mrs Weasley knew too.

She had her own reasons for knowing, though she didn’t share them. Most of those reasons lay in a box under her bed, written on very good parchment in small, spiky writing, in green ink. Mrs Weasley had read every one of them twice, the way Ron had read his. She had decided some time ago that Miss Malfoy was a delightful young lady. She had also decided she would make a wonderful wife for Harry one day. She had not decided to tell anybody either of these things.

‘Maroon, Ron?’ she said innocently. ‘You told me last Christmas you’d sooner be seen dead.’

‘It’s for the dark,’ said Ron.

‘Is it, dear?’ said Mrs Weasley. ‘Well. It’s nice to see you taking such an interest in how you look. Most mornings I can’t get you to find a comb.’

Ron muttered something into his collar. Mrs Weasley took her old coat down off its peg and pulled it on over her dressing gown. Then she lifted the lantern from its hook by the door.

‘I’ll see you down to the gate,’ she said. ‘Harry, dear, here.’ She pressed a packet of sandwiches wrapped in greaseproof paper into his hands. ‘Corned beef. I know you don’t mind it. Put them in your pocket, there’s a good boy, in case Arthur forgets you all need feeding.’

‘Molly, I never-’

‘You do, Arthur.’

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny followed the twins out across the dark yard, with Mrs Weasley’s lantern bobbing along beside them. It was cold. The moon was still up. Away to their right, a faint greenish smudge along the edge of the sky was the only sign that dawn was on its way.

Harry’s head was full of wizards: thousands upon thousands of them, all making for the Quidditch World Cup at once. He lengthened his stride to catch up with Mr Weasley.

‘So how does everyone get there without all the Muggles noticing?’ he asked. He was thinking about the *Daily Prophet* on the little table in the passage last night, with its angry Muggles. He didn’t like the feeling it gave him in his stomach.

‘It’s been a massive organisational problem,’ sighed Mr Weasley. ‘The trouble is, about a hundred thousand wizards turn up at the World Cup, and of course, we just haven’t got a magical site big enough to accommodate them all.’

Mr Weasley said it as though it were an enormous number. It was, Harry supposed. But it seemed very small indeed when it was nearly every witch and wizard from all over the world put together. The crowd in New York was three times as big as that by now, if Hermione's radio was right. He kept that thought to himself. He was beginning to see that wizards would never understand what he was trying to tell them about Muggles. Besides, he wanted to enjoy the Quidditch World Cup. He wanted it to be an escape, from Muggle nonsense, from whoever was next in the queue to try and kill him.

'There are places Muggles can't penetrate,' Mr Weasley went on, 'but imagine trying to pack a hundred thousand wizards into Diagon Alley or Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. So we had to find a nice deserted moor, and set up as many anti-Muggle precautions as possible. The whole Ministry's been working on it for months. First, of course, we have to stagger the arrivals. People with cheaper tickets have to arrive two weeks beforehand. A limited number use Muggle transport, like those Apache helicopters.'

Harry winced. Mr Weasley had got that one wrong. No wizard, not even a Muggleborn, was turning up to anything in an American military helicopter.

'But we can't have too many clogging up their helicopters and those flying rucksacks of theirs,' said Mr Weasley. 'Remember, wizards are coming from all over the world. Some Apparate, of course, but we have to set up safe points for them to appear, well away from Muggles. I believe there's a handy wood they're using as the Apparition point. For those who don't want to Apparate, or can't, we use Portkeys. They're objects that are used to transport wizards from one spot to another at a prearranged time. You can do large groups at a time if you need to. There's been two hundred Portkeys

placed at strategic points around Britain, and the nearest one to us is up at the top of Stoatshead Hill, so that's where we're headed.'

He pointed ahead. Past the little village of Ottery St Catchpole, a great black shape blotted out the stars.

'What sort of objects are Portkeys?' said Harry curiously.

'Well, they can be anything,' said Mr Weasley. 'Unobtrusive things, obviously, so Muggles don't go picking them up and playing with them… stuff they'll just think is litter…'

'Brilliant,' said Harry. 'Magic litter. Just what I need. I'm sick to death of things that grab hold of you and drag you off somewhere, I am. I had enough of that with that bloody Myst book.'

Ron snorted. Hermione gave a little cough that was really a laugh. Everybody else stared at him.

'He means last year,' said Ron, seeing their faces. 'His adventure. There was a book. It went wrong. Long story.'

Hermione gave him a look. Ron shut his mouth.

Mrs Weasley sighed. It was the long, heavy sigh of a mother who had been hearing this sort of thing for three years and had never once got used to it. She stopped by the gate at the bottom of the yard, set down the lantern and began straightening Harry's collar. Then she tugged the green jumper down over his belt.

'Oh, Harry,' she said. 'Why can't you just have a nice, quiet year at Hogwarts? Just one? Is that really so very much to ask?'

'Can't, Mrs Weasley,' said Harry gravely. 'I love danger, me. I go looking for it on purpose. I can't stand a single moment's peace. My favourite bit of the whole year is when the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher tries to kill me. That's three out of three so far. I'm really hoping for four.'

Fred and George laughed out loud from the lane. Even Ginny giggled. Mrs Weasley didn't laugh at all. She took hold of Harry by

both shoulders. She held him there, firmly, the way Harry had seen her hold Ginny when Ginny was upset, and he found that he couldn't have pulled away if he had tried.

'You deserve some peace, Harry,' she said fiercely. 'You do. More than anybody I know. I wish to goodness I could give it to you.'

Something hot rose up in Harry's throat. For one awful moment he thought he was going to cry.

Then he remembered that he didn't cry any more. He had cried at the end of his second year, in the sunshine, in front of Dumbledore, with the whole school walking past him with their trunks. He remembered that now with a lurch of something like revulsion. There was anger in it, and a great deal of shame. Dumbledore was wise. That had been embarrassing. It would not happen again. Harry was going to have to be strong for the things he had to do, especially if the Muggles were going to be part of them now.

So he went through the wand movements in his head instead, the ones he had practised all summer with a pencil in front of the wardrobe mirror. Disarming Charm: a flick, then a sharp jab. Shield Charm: the wide sweep. The Stunning Spell from the back of Dudley's old exercise book. He went through them all, in order, until his throat had cooled down. He wasn't going to crumble into Mrs Weasley's arms in the middle of a farmyard, however much part of him wanted to.

Part of him wanted it very badly. Part of him just wanted a mum, to cuddle him, look after him and tell him everything was going to be all right. But that was for children. It was certainly for children whose parents hadn't been murdered by Voldemort. It was most certainly not for the Boy Who Lived. He had to harden himself. He had to be better than that.

He stepped back out of her grip.

'Careful, Mrs Weasley,' he said, with a crooked grin. 'You'll squash the sandwiches.'

Mrs Weasley looked at him for a long moment. Then she smiled, rather wetly, and let him go.

Ron had seen all of it. He didn't say a word. As they went out through the gate he simply put his hand on Harry's shoulder and left it there for a few steps. Harry understood. *You're not on your own, mate. You've got us.* Then Ron took his hand away, and they were out in the lane.

When Harry looked back, the lantern was still standing by the gate. Mrs Weasley was a small dark shape beside it, watching them go.

The lane down to the village was dark and damp. Nobody spoke. Their footsteps were the only sound. As they passed between the silent cottages of Ottery St Catchpole, the sky began to lighten very slowly, from ink to the deepest blue. Harry's fingers and toes had gone numb. Mr Weasley kept looking at his watch.

Then came Stoatshead Hill. Before long only Harry had any breath to spare, thanks to three years of Oliver Wood's training. The others were all too busy panting. They kept stumbling into rabbit holes they couldn't see, or slipping on thick black clumps of grass. At long last the ground levelled out beneath their feet.

'Whose… idea… was it,' gasped Ron, bent double, 'to put it… on top of a… hill?'

'The Ministry's,' said Harry. 'They're weeding out the weak. Survival of the fittest. Hermione'd tell you all about it if she ever gets up here.'

'You're not even… out of breath… you git.'

‘Four nights a week, in the pouring rain, with Wood screaming at you. This is practically a holiday for me.’

‘Remind me… never to be… a Seeker.’

‘You’d have to get on a broom first.’

‘I *can* get on a broom!’

‘Getting on’s easy,’ said Harry. ‘Getting off the right way up’s the hard bit.’

Ron tried to cuff him round the head. He missed, mostly because he was still wheezing. That set them both off. They leant on each other, laughing like idiots at the top of a hill in the dark, until Ron had a coughing fit.

‘Whew,’ panted Mr Weasley. He took off his glasses to polish them on his golfing jumper. ‘Well, we’ve made good time. We’ve got ten minutes.’

Hermione came over the top of the hill last of all, holding her side.

‘Now we just need the Portkey,’ said Mr Weasley, putting his glasses back on and peering about at the grass. ‘It won’t be big… Come on…’

They spread out to search. They had only been looking for a couple of minutes, though, when a shout rang out across the still air.

‘Over here, Arthur! Over here, son, we’ve got it.’

On the far side of the hilltop, two tall figures stood out black against the starry sky.

‘Amos!’ said Mr Weasley, smiling. He went striding across to greet him, with the others trailing after.

Mr Weasley was soon shaking hands with a wizard who had a scrubby brown beard and a ruddy face. In his other hand he was holding a mouldy old boot.

‘This is Amos Diggory, everyone,’ said Mr Weasley. ‘He works for the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures. And I think you know his son, Cedric?’

Cedric Diggory was about seventeen, and extremely handsome. He was Captain of the Hufflepuff Quidditch team at Hogwarts, as well as their Seeker.

‘Hi,’ said Cedric, looking round at them all.

He held out his hand. Harry shook it at once. He thought Cedric was a lovely bloke. Cedric had gone out of his way to say sorry for winning their match last year, after Harry fell off his broom. Harry suspected he was about to do it again.

‘Harry,’ said Cedric warmly. ‘I was hoping you’d be here. Look, I never did say it properly, about the match…’

‘You said it about four times,’ said Harry. ‘You’ll wear the word out.’

Cedric laughed. He had a good laugh, easy and unembarrassed. ‘Fair enough. How’s the Firebolt? I haven’t stopped thinking about it since that breakfast.’

‘Stuck in my trunk all summer. My uncle would’ve had a heart attack if I’d flown it.’

‘Shame,’ said Cedric. ‘Still, it’ll keep. I’d like a go on it one day, if you’d let me. I promise I’ll give it back.’

Then he turned to the others. He shook every hand in turn, even Ginny’s, which made her go scarlet. Each of them got the same little nod.

‘Diggory, Cedric Diggory,’ he said.

He said it like somebody off one of the spy films Vernon watched every Christmas, with a charm a secret agent would have been proud of. It seemed to work on everyone. It even worked, for a moment, on Fred and George. They had never forgiven Hufflepuff

for that match, no matter how decent Cedric had been about it. Harry saw both of them almost smile before they remembered themselves.

‘Sorry again about all that, Harry,’ said Cedric, coming back to him. ‘It’s been bothering me all summer.’

‘Don’t worry about it,’ said Harry. ‘I’ll let you off once Gryffindor have beaten Hufflepuff this year.’

Cedric chuckled. ‘I’ll look forward to it. I’d like to beat you fairly, this time. Properly.’

Harry chuckled back. From anybody else it would have been an insult. From Cedric he knew it was meant in the friendliest way. Fred and George had stopped almost smiling, though. They were staring daggers at Cedric’s back.

‘Long walk, Arthur?’ Cedric’s father asked.

‘Not too bad,’ said Mr Weasley. ‘We live just on the other side of the village there. You?’

‘Had to get up at two, didn’t we, Ced? I tell you, I’ll be glad when he’s got his Apparition test. Still… not complaining… Quidditch World Cup, wouldn’t miss it for a sackful of Galleons, and the tickets cost about that. Mind you, looks like I got off easy…’

Amos Diggory looked cheerfully round at the three Weasley boys, then at Harry, Hermione and Ginny.

‘All these yours, Arthur?’

‘Oh no, only the redheads,’ said Mr Weasley, waving a hand at his own brood. ‘This is Hermione, friend of Ron’s, and Harry, another friend-’

‘Merlin’s beard,’ said Amos Diggory. His eyes had gone very round. ‘Harry? Harry Potter?’

Harry sighed in exasperation.

‘Nope. Barry Trotter, Mr Diggory. Harry Potter is that berk who keeps putting himself in danger. I just want to finish my Transfiguration homework.’

Amos let out a huge belly laugh.

‘Oh dear boy, Cedric told me you have a wicked sense of humour. I see he was right.’

‘You’ve got to laugh when you keep ending up in near death situations, Mr Diggory,’ said Harry drily.

‘Oh, yes. Quite right.’ Mr Diggory nodded sagely, as if he couldn’t think of anything else to say.

Harry was used to this. Everybody he met did the same thing. First they stared, then their eyes went straight up to the scar. He had never learnt to like it.

‘Ced’s talked about you, of course,’ said Amos Diggory. ‘Told us all about playing against you last year… I said to him, I said… Ced, that’ll be something to tell your grandchildren, that will… You beat Harry Potter!’

Harry couldn’t think of any answer to that. He kept quiet. Fred and George were scowling again. Cedric looked a little embarrassed.

‘Harry fell off his broom, Dad,’ he muttered. ‘I told you… it was an accident…’

‘Yes, but you didn’t fall off, did you?’ boomed Amos, clapping Cedric on the back so hard he staggered. ‘Always modest, our Ced, always the gentleman… but the best man won, I’m sure Harry’d say the same, wouldn’t you, eh? One falls off his broom, one stays on, you don’t need to be a genius to tell which one’s the better flyer!’

‘Must be nearly time,’ said Mr Weasley quickly, taking out his watch again. ‘Do you know whether we’re waiting for any more, Amos?’

‘No, the Lovegoods have been there for a week already and the Fawcetts couldn’t get tickets,’ said Mr Diggory. ‘I’ve had complaints about the Lovegood girl. She has this small apparatus…Oh, but not to worry. There aren’t any more of us in this area, are there?’

‘Not that I know of,’ said Mr Weasley. ‘Yes, it’s a minute off… We’d better get ready…’ He looked round at Harry and Hermione. ‘You just need to touch the Portkey, that’s all, a finger will do…’

Harry looked at Hermione and Ron.

‘If I end up on another rainy and dilapidated island,’ he muttered, low enough that only they could hear, ‘I’m filing a complaint.’

‘Who would you even complain to, mate?’ Ron asked.

‘Anyone who’ll listen at this point,’ said Harry irritably.

Their bulky rucksacks made it difficult. Somehow, though, all nine of them managed to crowd round the old boot Amos Diggory was holding out. They stood there in a tight ring while a cold breeze swept across the hilltop. Nobody said anything. It occurred to Harry, quite suddenly, how strange they would look if a Muggle came walking up here now. Nine people, including two grown men, all hanging on to a manky old boot in the half dark, waiting…

‘Three…’ murmured Mr Weasley, watching the second hand, ‘two… one…’

It felt to Harry as though a hook had caught him just behind the navel, then yanked. The ground dropped away beneath him. He could feel Ron’s shoulder bash into his on one side, Hermione’s on the other. Wind roared past them. Colours streamed by in a blur. His finger was glued to the boot, which seemed to be towing all nine of them along behind it.

His feet hit the ground with a jolt that rattled his teeth. Ron staggered into him. Harry fell flat on his back in wet grass.

‘*Bollocks*,’ said Harry, with feeling. Then he said several more things, in a long, low, steady stream, without repeating himself once.

He had learnt every one of them on the Knight Bus last summer, from the dodgy bloke in the long tan raincoat. Harry had never found out his name. He had never forgotten his vocabulary, though. Fred stopped trying to get up just to listen.

The Portkey landed with a heavy thud next to his head.

Harry looked up. Cedric and the two fathers had kept their feet, though all three looked thoroughly windswept. Everybody else was lying on the ground.

‘Seven past five from Stoatshead Hill,’ said a voice.

Harry untangled himself from Ron. He got to his feet, still muttering. They seemed to have landed on a wide, empty stretch of moor, with mist lying over it in sheets. In front of them stood two weary, grumpy wizards. One had a big gold watch in his hand. The other held a quill and a fat roll of parchment. Both of them were dressed as Muggles, though not at all convincingly. The first wore a tweed suit above a pair of galoshes that reached his thighs. His colleague had on a kilt, topped off with a poncho.

‘Morning, Basil,’ said Mr Weasley. He picked up the boot and handed it to the wizard in the kilt, who tossed it into a big box of used Portkeys at his feet. Inside, Harry glimpsed an old newspaper, an empty drinks can and a punctured football.

‘Hello there, Arthur,’ said Basil wearily. ‘Not on duty, eh? It’s all right for some… We’ve been here all night… You’d better get out of the way, we’ve got a big party coming in from the Black Forest at five fifteen. Hang on, I’ll find your campsite… Weasley… Weasley…’ He ran his quill down his list. ‘About a quarter of a mile’s walk over there, first field you come to. Site manager’s called Mr Roberts. Diggory… second field… ask for Mr Payne.’

‘Thanks, Basil,’ said Mr Weasley. He waved for everyone to follow him.

Harry was still feeling the effects of the Portkey. His stomach seemed to have arrived a few seconds after the rest of him.

‘Stupid, bloody, ridiculous way to get anywhere,’ he said under his breath as they walked. ‘Boots. Grabbing you by the belly button. Throwing you on your back in a bog. Who thinks of this stuff? Who sat down one day and said, *I know, let’s make a boot that does that*?’

‘Wizards,’ said Hermione.

‘Exactly,’ said Harry darkly.

They set off across the empty moor. The mist was so thick they could see hardly anything. After about twenty minutes a little stone cottage loomed up out of it, with a gate beside it. Behind it, ghostly through the mist, stood tents, hundreds upon hundreds of them. They covered the long, gentle slope of a huge field, right up to a black line of trees at the top.

The Diggorys went off to find their own field. The rest of them walked up to the cottage. In its doorway, a man stood gazing out over the tents. One look was enough to tell Harry that this was the only genuine Muggle for acres around. Hearing them coming, he looked round.

‘Morning!’ said Mr Weasley brightly.

‘Morning,’ said the Muggle.

‘Would you be Mr Roberts?’

‘Aye, I would,’ said Mr Roberts. ‘And who’re you?’

‘Weasley. Two tents, booked a couple of days ago?’

‘Aye,’ said Mr Roberts, looking at a list pinned to the door. ‘You’ve got a space up by the wood there. Just the one night?’

‘That’s it,’ said Mr Weasley.

‘You’ll be paying now, then?’ said Mr Roberts.

‘Ah… right… certainly…’ said Mr Weasley.

He withdrew a little way from the cottage, beckoning Harry over.

‘Help me, Harry,’ he muttered. He pulled a roll of Muggle money out of his pocket and began to peel the notes apart. ‘This one’s a… a… a ten? Ah yes, I see the little number on it now… So this is a five?’

‘It’s a twenty,’ said Harry, with as much patience as he could find at half past five in the morning. ‘It says twenty. Look. It says it in the corner, in the other corner and right across the middle in big letters. That’s a ten. It says ten. That’s a five. It says five. They’ve all got the Queen on them, so don’t go by her, she’s the same on every one.’

‘Ah yes, so it is… I don’t know, these little bits of paper…’

‘You foreign?’ Mr Roberts asked, when Mr Weasley came back with the correct money.

‘Yeah,’ said Harry sarcastically. ‘We’re from bloody Timbuktu. You can tell from our accents and funny clothes.’

‘Foreign?’ repeated Mr Weasley, puzzled.

‘You’re not the first one who’s had trouble with money,’ said Mr Roberts, looking hard at Mr Weasley. ‘I had two try and pay me with great gold coins the size of hubcaps ten minutes ago.’

‘Did you really?’ said Mr Weasley nervously.

Mr Roberts dug about in an old biscuit tin for change.

‘Never been this crowded,’ he said suddenly, his eyes going back to the field in the mist. ‘Hundreds of prebookings. People usually just turn up…’

‘Is that right?’ said Mr Weasley. His hand was out, waiting. Mr Roberts kept hold of the change.

‘Aye,’ he said thoughtfully. ‘People from all over. Loads of foreigners. And not just foreigners. Weirdos, you know? There’s a bloke walking round in a kilt and a poncho.’

Harry tried not to be anxious. It was no use. He kept thinking about that news report, the *Prophet*, and all the baffled stories the Weasleys had told over dinner without the slightest idea what they meant. He found that he had gone very still, listening.

'Shouldn't he?' said Mr Weasley anxiously.

'It's like some sort of… I dunno… like some sort of rally,' said Mr Roberts. 'They all seem to know each other. Like a big party. If I had half a mind, I'd reckon they were Muti-'

With a soft pop, a wizard in plus fours was suddenly standing by Mr Roberts's front door.

'*Obliviate!*' he snapped, with his wand on Mr Roberts.

Mr Roberts's gaze went soft and blank. His frown smoothed away. A dreamy, untroubled look came over his face. Harry knew that look. He was watching a man whose memory had just been changed for him.

Was that it? Harry thought. Was that all wizards could be bothered to do? A hundred thousand of them were camping round an ordinary Muggle, and they just Obliviated him, the way you might put a plaster on a werewolf bite. Meanwhile the whole of the normal world was looking for any excuse to batter somebody who showed the least bit of strangeness. The wizards didn't even care to know about it. *Bloody idiot wizards*, thought Harry.

He glared at the wizard in plus fours.

'This is not bloody efficient!' he hissed. 'Don't you-'

'A map of the campsite for you,' said Mr Roberts serenely, handing it to Mr Weasley. 'And your change.'

'Thanks very much,' said Mr Weasley. He put a firm hand on Harry's shoulder, steering him away.

The wizard in plus fours looked worn out. He badly needed a shave. There were purple smudges under his eyes. He walked with

them towards the gate. Once they were out of Mr Roberts's earshot, he muttered to Mr Weasley.

'Been having a lot of trouble with him. Needs a Memory Charm ten times a day to keep him happy. And Ludo Bagman's not helping. Trotting around talking about Bludgers and Quaffles at the top of his voice, not a worry about anti-Muggle security. Blimey, I'll be glad when this is over. See you later, Arthur.'

He Disapparated with a crack.

Harry sighed. He made the sign of the cross, the way the vicar did at the end of the service. *Stupid bloody wizards.*

'You all right, mate?' said Ron quietly, at his elbow.

'Fine,' said Harry. 'Brilliant. Never better.'

Ron didn't believe a word of it. Harry could tell. He walked on beside him all the same, a little closer than before, so that their elbows bumped.

'I thought Mr Bagman was Head of Magical Games and Sports,' said Ginny, looking surprised. 'He should know better than to talk about Bludgers near Muggles, shouldn't he?'

'He should,' Mr Weasley agreed with a smile, ushering them in at the gate, 'but Ludo's always been a bit… well… lax about security. You couldn't wish for a more enthusiastic head of the sports department, though. He played Quidditch for England himself, you know. And he was the best Beater the Wimbourne Wasps ever had.'

Up through the mist they went, between endless rows of tents. Most of them could almost have passed for Muggle ones. Somebody had clearly tried hard with each, only to spoil it at the last moment by adding a chimney, a bell pull or a weather vane. Now and then, though, they came to a tent so blatantly magical that Harry quite understood why Mr Roberts had grown suspicious.

Halfway up the field rose a towering affair of striped silk, like a little palace. A row of live peacocks was tethered at its entrance. They were white ones, every one of them, as pale as ghosts in the mist.

‘Three guesses whose that is,’ said Ron darkly.

Mr Weasley’s mouth went thin. He didn’t slow down. He didn’t speed up either, but Harry noticed that he walked on the far side of the path from the silk palace, with his chin up, without looking at it once.

Harry looked, though. He couldn’t help it. He looked at the closed flap of the doorway, half expecting to see a silver-blonde head appear between the peacocks. It didn’t, of course. It wasn’t even six o’clock. She would be asleep in there somewhere, behind all that silk. One of the peacocks gave a sudden, unearthly scream. Harry jumped.

Hermione’s hand slid into the crook of his arm, steering him gently onward.

‘Dracina says they’ve got a fountain inside it,’ she said brightly. ‘She wrote to me on Thursday. She says it’s vulgar.’

‘She would,’ said Harry. He was smiling before he knew it.

Hermione was watching his face. Her own smile stayed exactly where it was, which was very slightly too wide. Her fingers tightened on his arm. She and Dracina were friends now, real ones. They had been since the end of last term. They wrote to each other every week. It didn’t make the slightest difference.

A little further on they passed a tent three storeys high, with several turrets. Not far beyond that stood one with its own front garden, complete with a birdbath, a sundial and a fountain.

‘Always the same,’ said Mr Weasley, smiling. ‘We can’t resist showing off when we get together. Ah, here we are, look, this is us.’

At last they reached the top of the field, where the wood began. Here there was an empty patch of ground, with a little sign hammered into it that read WEEZLY.

'Couldn't have a better spot!' said Mr Weasley happily. 'The field is just on the other side of the wood there, we're as close as we could be.' He hoisted his rucksack from his shoulders. 'Right,' he said excitedly, 'no magic allowed, strictly speaking, not when we're out in these numbers on Muggle land. We'll be putting these tents up by hand! Shouldn't be too difficult… Muggles do it all the time… Here, Harry, where do you reckon we should start?'

Harry had never camped anywhere. No Dursley holiday had ever included him. Instead they had always left him behind with Mrs Figg, an old woman who lived a few streets away. Luckily Hermione had been camping with her parents in France. Between the two of them they puzzled out which pole went where, with every peg in roughly the right place. Mr Weasley hindered more than he helped. He got wildly overexcited whenever the mallet was involved. In the end, though, they managed to put up a pair of shabby little tents, each meant for two.

They all stood back to admire their work. No one would ever take these tents for wizards' tents, Harry thought. The snag was the numbers. When Bill, Charlie and Percy arrived there would be ten of them. Hermione had evidently done the same sum. She raised her eyebrows at Harry while Mr Weasley got down on his hands and knees, then crawled into the first tent.

'We'll be a bit cramped,' he called, 'but I think we'll all squeeze in. Come and have a look.'

Harry stooped, crawled in under the flap, then stopped dead with his mouth open.

He was standing in what seemed to be an old fashioned flat, with three rooms, a bathroom and a kitchen. Strangely enough, it was done out exactly like Mrs Figg's front room, right down to the crocheted covers on chairs that didn't match. Everything smelt powerfully of cats.

'Well, it's not for long,' said Mr Weasley, mopping the bald patch on his head with a handkerchief. He looked through at the bedroom, where four bunk beds stood against the walls. 'I borrowed this from Perkins at the office. Doesn't camp much any more, poor fellow, he's got lumbago.' He picked up a dusty kettle and looked inside it. 'We'll need water…'

'There's a tap marked on this map the Muggle gave us,' said Ron. He had followed Harry into the tent, but he didn't seem to think its amazing inner size was worth remarking on. 'It's on the other side of the field.'

'Well, why don't you, Harry and Hermione go and get us some water then,' said Mr Weasley, pressing the kettle on them, along with two saucepans, 'and the rest of us will get some wood for a fire?'

'But we've got an oven,' said Ron. 'Why can't we just-'

'Ron, anti-Muggle security!' said Mr Weasley, positively glowing at the prospect. 'When real Muggles camp, they cook on fires outdoors. I've seen them at it!'

They had a quick look round the girls' tent first. It was a little smaller than the boys', though it didn't smell of cats. Then the three of them set off across the campsite, carrying the kettle and saucepans.

By now the sun had come up. The mist was lifting off the field, so that they could see the whole city of tents spread out in every direction. They wandered slowly along the rows, staring about them. Harry was only now beginning to grasp just how many wizards the

world must hold. He had never really given much thought to the ones in other countries.

The campers round them were beginning to stir. The families with small children woke up first. Harry had never seen such young witches and wizards before. Outside a big tent shaped like a pyramid, a tiny boy of about two was squatting in the grass with a wand in his fist. He was prodding contentedly at a slug, which was slowly swelling up to the size of a salami. Just as they drew level with him, his mother came rushing out of the tent.

'How many times, Kevin? You don't… touch… Daddy's… wand… eeeurgh!'

She had stepped on the giant slug. It burst. Her scolding followed them for some way through the still air, mixed up with the little boy's howls.

'You bust slug! You bust slug!'

Harry chuckled. He wondered whether he would have been like that at two, if his mum and dad had still been around. He couldn't even remember being two. All he could remember was the Dursleys, and the cupboard.

'All I remember is the cupboard,' he said aloud, before he could stop himself.

Then he saw Hermione's face. She had gone quite white. Her hand had slipped into her pocket, where Harry knew she kept the little red notebook. Her lips were moving very slightly, as though she were committing something to memory.

'Look!' said Ron loudly, pointing. 'Look at that, those two, on the brooms!'

Hermione's hand came out of her pocket. Harry looked.

A short way further on, two little witches hardly older than Kevin were riding toy broomsticks. The brooms hovered so low that

the girls' toes trailed through the wet grass. A Ministry wizard had spotted them already. As he rushed by, Harry heard him muttering distractedly to himself.

'In broad daylight! Parents having a lie-in, I suppose…'

All over the field, grown witches and wizards were coming out of their tents to cook breakfast. Some glanced furtively about before conjuring fires with their wands. Others were striking Muggle matches, peering at them doubtfully, as though quite certain the things could never work. Three African wizards in long white robes were deep in serious conversation. Over a bright purple fire in front of them, they were roasting what appeared to be a cat. An English wizard in a hairnet was standing over them, screaming.

'That's my cat! That's Mr Nibbles! Someone disenchanted my tent zipper!'

The three african wizards looked blankly. In that way they did when they wanted someone to think they couldn't understand them after they committed a crime. They went on looking whilst the other man shouted. Now enunciating loudly.

A little way off, a group of middle aged American witches sat gossiping happily under a spangled banner strung between their tents. It read THE SALEM WITCHES' INSTITUTE. From inside the tents they passed came snatches of talk in strange languages. Harry couldn't understand a word of it. Every voice sounded excited, though, whatever it was saying.

'Er… is it my eyes, or has everything gone green?' said Ron.

Ron's eyes were fine. They had wandered into a stretch of tents that were each covered in a thick growth of shamrocks. It looked as though a crop of small, oddly shaped hillocks had sprung up out of the ground. Under the ones with their flaps open, they could see grinning faces.

Then they heard their names called from behind them.

‘Harry! Ron! Hermione!’

Seamus Finnigan, who shared Harry and Ron’s dormitory at Hogwarts, was waving from outside a tent so thick with shamrocks it was hardly a tent at all. Beside him sat a woman with sandy hair who could only be his mother. Dean Thomas, his best friend, sat with them. Wisely without his West Ham colours.

‘Like the decorations?’ said Seamus, grinning. ‘The Ministry’s not too happy.’

‘Ah, why shouldn’t we show our colours?’ said Mrs Finnigan. ‘You should see what the Bulgarians have got dangling all over their tents. You’ll be supporting Ireland, of course?’ she added, fixing Harry, Ron and Hermione with a beady eye.

‘Ireland,’ Harry, Ron and Hermione assured her, all together. Then they set off again.

‘At least they’re like us,’ said Ron.

‘I wonder what the Bulgarians have got dangling all over their tents?’ said Hermione.

‘Let’s go and have a look,’ said Harry. He pointed to a big patch of tents further up the field, where the Bulgarian flag was flying in the breeze, white, green and red.

These tents hadn’t been covered in plants. Instead, every single one had the same poster stuck to it. It showed a sullen young man with thick black eyebrows. The picture moved, of course, but all it ever did was blink and scowl.

‘Krum,’ said Ron quietly.

‘What?’ said Hermione.

‘Krum!’ said Ron. ‘Viktor Krum, the Bulgarian Seeker!’

‘He looks really grumpy,’ said Hermione, looking round at the rows of Krums glowering down at them.

‘Really grumpy?’ Ron rolled his eyes up to the sky. ‘Who cares what he looks like? He’s unbelievable. He’s really young too. Only just eighteen or something. He’s a genius, you wait until tonight, you’ll see.’

A short queue had already formed at the tap, over in the corner. Harry, Ron and Hermione tagged on behind two men who were in the middle of a blazing row. One was an ancient wizard in a flowery nightgown that came down to his ankles. The other was plainly from the Ministry. He was waving a pair of pinstriped trousers at the old man, close to tears.

‘Just put them on, Archie, there’s a good chap. You can’t walk around like that, the Muggle at the gate’s already getting suspicious…’

‘I bought this in a Muggle shop,’ said the old wizard stubbornly. ‘Muggles wear them.’

‘Muggle women wear them, Archie, not the men, they wear these,’ said the Ministry wizard. He brandished the pinstriped trousers at him.

‘I’m not putting them on,’ said old Archie indignantly. ‘I like a healthy breeze round my privates, thanks.’

Hermione was seized by such a violent fit of giggles at this that she had to leave the queue altogether. She only came back once Archie had filled his jug and wandered off.

Ron shook his head.

‘I don’t care what Muggles do,’ he said. ‘A man shouldn’t wear women’s clothes. That’s obvious.’

The water was heavy. They walked back through the campsite more slowly. Near the edge of the wood, where the path ran close beside the trees, Harry noticed something in the grass. It was a cigarette end. Somebody had dropped it there only a minute or two

before, because a thin grey thread of smoke was still curling up from it. Harry frowned down at it as he passed. He had hardly ever seen a wizard smoke. The only one he could think of was the dodgy bloke on the Knight Bus, and Stan hadn't let him light up. He wondered whether the rest of them did, the way Muggles did, or whether a hundred thousand wizards had brought one Muggle along by mistake. He looked round. There was nobody near the trees at all.

They passed several faces they knew, Hogwarts students out with their families. Oliver Wood, who had captained Harry's House team until he left in the summer, dragged Harry off to meet his parents.

'I'm off to my Basic Recruit Training Course, soon.' he said breathlessly, pumping Harry's hand. 'RAF, Harry! Just like my dad.'

Then Ernie Macmillan, a Hufflepuff in their year, shouted hello. Further along was Cho Chang, the very pretty Ravenclaw Seeker. She smiled at Harry, waving. He waved back, slopping a good deal of water down the front of his new jumper and feeling oddly drawn to her.

Hermione's hand clamped down on his arm. It was a very hard grip indeed. A low sound was coming out of her, somewhere at the back of her throat. It took Harry a moment to realise what it was. Hermione Granger was snarling, like a lioness over a kill.

'Easy, Hermione,' said Ron. Without any fuss, he reached over and calmly prised her fingers off Harry's arm, one at a time. 'He's only waving. He waves at Hagrid's dog.'

Hermione let go. She stalked on ahead of them with her saucepan, her bushy hair bristling. Harry rubbed his arm. There were going to be four little bruises there by tonight, he could tell. He had known for a while that Hermione could be intense. He hadn't known she could be quite *that* intense. He put it down to the early start.

Ron was smirking at him. Harry hurriedly pointed at a large group of teenagers he had never seen before, more to wipe the smirk off Ron's face than anything else.

'Who d'you reckon they are?' he said. 'They don't go to Hogwarts, do they?'

''Spect they go to some foreign school,' said Ron. 'I know there are others. Never met anyone who went to one, though. Bill had a penpal at a school in Brazil-'

'What, like yours?' Harry teased.

Ron sighed. 'Never you mind.'

'Oh, I won't, Ron,' said Harry, grinning cheekily.

Now that he could see so many different nationalities round him, it seemed silly that he had never once wondered whether there might be other schools besides Hogwarts. He glanced at Hermione, who had waited for them to catch up. She didn't look in the least surprised. She had probably read all about them years ago.

'You've been ages,' said George, when they finally trudged back up to the tents.

'Met a few people,' said Ron, putting the water down. 'You've not got that fire started yet?'

'Dad's having fun with the matches,' said Fred.

Mr Weasley was having no luck whatever with the fire, though not for want of trying. Broken matches lay scattered all round him on the grass. He was plainly enjoying himself enormously.

'Oops!' he said. A match had flared at last. He was so surprised that he dropped it.

'Come here, Mr Weasley,' said Hermione kindly. She took the box from him, then showed him the right way to strike one.

They got the fire lit at last. It took another hour, at least, before it was any good for cooking. Luckily there was plenty to look at while

they waited. Their tents seemed to be pitched right beside a sort of main road up to the field. A steady stream of Ministry people bustled along it, all calling out cheerful greetings to Mr Weasley. Mr Weasley named every one of them, mainly for Harry and Hermione. His own children had grown up with the Ministry. They found it far too dull to listen.

'That was Cuthbert Mockridge, Head of the Goblin Liaison Office… Here comes Gilbert Wimple, he's with the Committee on Experimental Charms, he's had those horns for a while now… Hello, Arnie… Arnold Peasegood, he's an Obliviator, member of the Accidental Magic Reversal Squad, you know… and that's Bode and Croaker… they're Unspeakables…'

'They're what?'

'From the Department of Mysteries, top secret, no idea what they get up to…'

Once, while Mr Weasley was pointing out somebody from the Department of Magical Transportation, a breath of smoke drifted out of the trees behind the tent. It was the smell of a Muggle cigarette, like the ones Uncle Vernon's friends from Grunnings smoked in the garden at his barbecues. Harry turned round. There was nobody there, only the dark spaces between the trunks. Somewhere a twig snapped. Then there was nothing.

'Harry? Eggs?'

The fire was ready at last. The first sausages had barely begun to spit when out of the wood strolled Bill, Charlie and Percy.

'Just Apparated, Dad,' said Percy loudly. 'Ah, excellent, lunch!'

Lunch was half eaten when Mr Weasley sprang up, beaming, to wave at somebody marching towards them across the grass.

'Aha!' he said. 'The man of the moment! Ludo!'

Of all the people Harry had seen that day, Ludo Bagman was by far the hardest to miss, old Archie in his flowery nightdress included. His long Quidditch robes had broad black stripes across bright yellow. A giant wasp sprawled over his chest. He looked like a strong man who had let himself go a little. The robes strained across a big round belly he could never have had back when he had played for England. His nose was flattened, by a stray Bludger, Harry guessed. Still, with his round blue eyes, short fair hair and pink cheeks, he looked like an overgrown schoolboy.

'Ahoy there!' Bagman called happily. There was a bounce in his step, as though he had springs in his shoes. He was obviously thrilled to bits. 'Arthur, old man,' he puffed, arriving at the fire, 'what a day, eh? What a day! Could we have asked for more perfect weather? A cloudless night coming… and hardly a hiccough in the arrangements… Not much for me to do!'

Behind him, a gang of haggard Ministry wizards dashed past. They were pointing at the distant signs of some kind of magical fire, which was spitting violet sparks high above the tents.

Percy rushed forward, hand outstretched. He might disapprove of how Bagman ran his department, but he was clearly still desperate to impress him.

'Ah, yes,' said Mr Weasley, grinning, 'this is my son Percy. He's just started at the Ministry… and this is Fred… no, George, sorry… that's Fred… Bill, Charlie, Ron… my daughter, Ginny… and Ron's friends, Hermione Granger and Harry Potter.'

Bagman gave the smallest of double takes at Harry's name. His eyes made the familiar flick upwards, to Harry's scar.

'Everyone,' Mr Weasley went on, 'this is Ludo Bagman, you know who he is, it's thanks to him we've got such good tickets…'

Bagman beamed. He waved a hand as if to say it had been nothing at all.

'Fancy a flutter on the match, Arthur?' he said eagerly. The pockets of his striped robes clinked as he jingled them. They sounded very full of gold. 'I've already got Roddy Pontner betting me Bulgaria will score first. I offered him nice odds, considering Ireland's front three are the strongest I've seen in years. And little Agatha Timms has put up half shares in her eel farm on a weeklong match.'

'Oh… go on then,' said Mr Weasley. 'Let's see… a Galleon on Ireland to win?'

'A Galleon?' Ludo Bagman looked a little disappointed, but recovered himself. 'Very well, very well… any other takers?'

'They're a bit young to be gambling,' said Mr Weasley. 'Molly wouldn't like…'

'We'll bet thirty-seven Galleons, fifteen Sickles, three Knuts,' said Fred, while George hastily turned out every pocket he had, 'that Ireland wins, but Viktor Krum gets the Snitch. Oh and we'll throw in a fake wand.'

'You don't want to go showing Mr Bagman rubbish like that,' Percy hissed.

Bagman thought it was anything but rubbish. His boyish face lit up the moment Fred handed it over. It let out a loud squawk, then turned into a rubber chicken, which set Bagman howling with laughter.

'Excellent! I haven't seen one that convincing in years! I'd pay five Galleons for that!'

Percy froze, rigid with disapproval.

'Boys,' murmured Mr Weasley, 'I don't want you betting… That's all your savings… Your mother…'

‘Don’t be a spoilsport, Arthur!’ Bagman boomed, shaking his pockets so they jangled. ‘They’re old enough to know what they want! You reckon Ireland will win but Krum’ll get the Snitch? Not a chance, boys, not a chance… I’ll give you excellent odds on that one… We’ll add five Galleons for the funny wand, then, shall we…’

Mr Weasley could only look on as Bagman pulled out a notebook and quill to write down the twins’ names.

‘Cheers,’ said George. He took the slip Bagman gave him, then tucked it safely inside his jacket.

Bagman turned back to Mr Weasley, as cheerful as ever.

‘Couldn’t do me a brew, I suppose? I’m keeping an eye out for Barty Crouch. My Bulgarian opposite number’s making difficulties, and I can’t understand a word he’s saying. Barty’ll be able to sort it out. He speaks about a hundred and fifty languages.’

‘Mr Crouch?’ said Percy. He dropped his look of stiff disapproval all at once. He was positively writhing with excitement. ‘He speaks over two hundred! Mermish and Gobbledegook and Troll…’

‘Anyone can speak Troll,’ said Fred dismissively. ‘All you have to do is point and grunt.’

Percy threw Fred a very nasty look. He poked at the fire hard, until the kettle started to sing again.

‘Any news of Bertha Jorkins yet, Ludo?’ Mr Weasley asked, while Bagman made himself comfortable on the grass.

‘Not a dicky bird,’ said Bagman comfortably. ‘But she’ll turn up. Poor old Bertha… memory like a leaky cauldron and no sense of direction. Lost, you take my word for it. She’ll wander back into the office sometime in October, thinking it’s still July.’

‘You don’t think it might be time to send someone to look for her?’ Mr Weasley ventured, as Percy passed Bagman a mug.

‘Barty Crouch keeps saying that,’ said Bagman, round eyes widening innocently, ‘but we really can’t spare anyone at the moment. Oh, talk of the devil! Barty!’

A wizard had just Apparated beside their fire. Next to Bagman, who lay lolling in the grass, still in his old Wasp robes, he could hardly have looked more out of place. Barty Crouch was elderly, stiff and very upright. His suit and tie were beautifully pressed. His short grey hair was parted so straight it looked unnatural. His narrow toothbrush moustache might have been trimmed with a slide rule. His shoes shone like glass. Harry understood immediately why Percy worshipped him. Percy believed in following rules to the letter. Mr Crouch had obeyed the rule about dressing as a Muggle so thoroughly that anyone would have taken him for a bank manager. Even Uncle Vernon, Harry thought, would never have seen through him.

‘Pull up a bit of grass, Barty,’ said Ludo cheerfully, slapping the grass next to him.

‘No thank you, Ludo,’ said Crouch. There was an edge of impatience in his voice. ‘I’ve been looking for you everywhere. The Bulgarians are insisting we add another twelve seats to the Top Box.’

‘Oh, is that what they’re after?’ said Bagman. ‘I thought the chap was asking to borrow a pair of tweezers. Bit of a strong accent.’

‘Mr Crouch!’ said Percy breathlessly. He had bent himself into a kind of bow, which gave him a hunched look. ‘Would you like a cup of tea?’

‘Oh,’ said Mr Crouch, glancing at Percy in mild surprise. ‘Yes… thank you, Weatherby.’

Fred and George spluttered into their tea. Percy went very pink about the ears. He busied himself with the kettle.

‘Oh and I’ve been wanting a word with you too, Arthur,’ said Mr Crouch, turning his sharp gaze on Mr Weasley. ‘Ali Bashir’s on the warpath. He wants a word with you about your embargo on flying carpets. I can barely understand that accent of his.’

Mr Weasley sighed heavily.

‘I sent him an owl about that just last week. If I’ve told him once I’ve told him a hundred times: Carpets are defined as a Muggle Artefact by the Registry of Proscribed Charmable Objects, but will he listen?’

‘I doubt it,’ said Mr Crouch, taking a cup from Percy. ‘Give those people an inch, and they’ll take several miles and tell you how they belong inside those miles more than you do. He’s desperate to export here.’

‘Well, they’ll never replace brooms in Britain, will they?’ said Bagman.

‘I should bloody well hope not,’ said Harry irritably.

Nobody had asked him. He had been thinking about his Firebolt. Somewhere at the back of his mind, Uncle Vernon was grumbling about foreign drills.

Mr Crouch looked at him properly for the first time. His eyes went to Harry’s scar, then back to his face. Something that might almost have been approval passed across his own.

‘Quite so,’ he said crisply. ‘A British broom for a British sky.’ He turned back to Mr Weasley. ‘Ali thinks there’s a niche in the market for a family vehicle. I remember my grandfather had an Axminster that could seat twelve, but that was before carpets were banned, of course.’

His tone made it perfectly plain that no Crouch had ever broken a law.

‘So, been keeping busy, Barty?’ said Bagman breezily.

‘Fairly,’ said Mr Crouch drily. ‘Organising Portkeys across five continents is no mean feat, Ludo. Particularly with the Muggles in the state they are in.’

‘Oh, the Muggles!’ said Bagman, chuckling.

‘Yes, Ludo. The Muggles.’ Mr Crouch set his cup down on its saucer with a small, precise click. ‘That man at the gate used a particular word to one of my people last night, before the Memory Charm. Do you know what it was?’

‘Haven’t the foggiest.’

‘Mutie,’ said Mr Crouch. ‘It is what they call people who are born with powers. It is generally what they shout before they set fire to them.’

Harry went quite still. He had heard Mr Roberts start to say that very word, only that morning.

‘I read their newspapers, Ludo,’ Mr Crouch went on. ‘It is more than anybody else in this Ministry troubles to do. The Americans are debating, in their own parliament, whether to bring back the machines they built to hunt such people down. Machines. In this country there is already talk of a register. Half our own Ministry imagines it can all be tidied away with a few Memory Charms.’

‘Come off it, Barty,’ said Bagman comfortably. ‘They’re Muggles! They’re always getting worked up about something. Give it a month, they’ll be on to the next thing.’

‘They are not worked up. They are *organised*.’ Mr Crouch’s toothbrush moustache had gone very straight indeed. ‘There is a difference. I should be obliged if this Ministry would learn it before it is taught it.’

‘Oh, I’m sure it’s all a misunderstanding, Barty,’ said Mr Weasley kindly. ‘Muggles can be very excitable.’

‘Are you, Arthur?’ said Mr Crouch. ‘I’m not. What the Bulgarians’ Muggles get up to on the Bulgarian border is the Bulgarians’ affair. I told them to take it to their own Muggle Liaison Office. What ours get up to on British soil is mine. I will not have the Statute put at risk on this island because half the world’s wizards cannot be trusted to keep their tents plain. They will all go home when this is over. British wizards will be left to clear up after them, as we always have.’

Percy, who had called the Security Council a Muggle committee of no consequence only last night, was nodding so hard that his glasses were in danger of falling into the fire.

Harry stared at Mr Crouch. He felt a strange, fierce rush of relief, so strong it surprised him. Somebody knew. Somebody in the Ministry was actually reading the Muggle papers. He wasn’t sure he liked Mr Crouch much. He had a cold, clipped way of talking, as if every word cost him money. But he was the first grown wizard Harry had met who seemed to see what Harry saw.

He still meant to have that talk with Percy. Now he wanted one with Mr Crouch as well. Not here, with Bagman laughing and the twins kicking each other under the eggs. Some time soon, though, as soon as he could get either of them on his own.

‘I expect you’ll both be glad when this is over?’ said Mr Weasley.

Ludo Bagman looked shocked.

‘Glad! Don’t know when I’ve had more fun… Still, it’s not as though we haven’t got anything to look forward to, eh, Barty? Eh? Plenty left to organise, eh?’

Mr Crouch’s eyebrows went up.

‘We agreed not to make the announcement until all the details-’

‘Oh, details!’ said Bagman, flapping a hand as if at midges. ‘They’ve signed, haven’t they? They’ve agreed, haven’t they? I bet you anything these kids’ll know soon enough anyway. I mean, it’s happening at Hogwarts-’

‘Ludo, we need to meet the Bulgarians, you know,’ said Mr Crouch sharply, cutting him off. ‘Thank you for the tea, Weatherby.’

He handed Percy back his full cup, untouched. Then he stood waiting for Ludo. Bagman heaved himself up, draining his own tea in one gulp. The gold in his pockets jingled cheerfully.

‘See you all later!’ he said. ‘You’ll be up in the Top Box with me. I’m commentating!’

Bagman waved. Mr Crouch gave a short nod. Then both of them vanished with a crack.

‘What’s happening at Hogwarts, Dad?’ said Fred at once. ‘What were they talking about?’

‘You’ll find out soon enough,’ said Mr Weasley, smiling.

‘It’s classified information, until such time as the Ministry decides to release it,’ said Percy stiffly. ‘Mr Crouch was quite right not to disclose it.’

Harry sighed. He shut his eyes for a moment, then said a short prayer under his breath.

‘One quiet year, God. I’ll be your strongest soldier, just give me one bloody year I can just sit and do an exam without something trying to kill me.’

‘Oh shut up, Weatherby,’ said Fred to Percy.

As the afternoon wore on, a sense of excitement rose over the campsite like a cloud. Harry sat on the grass outside the tent with Mrs Weasley’s sandwiches. She had cut the crusts off every one of them. He ate them slowly, one after another, thinking about the lantern by the gate.

Ron was in and out of the tent all afternoon. Once he got up very suddenly.

'Loo,' said Ron, when Harry looked up. 'Back in a bit.'

He was gone for nearly half an hour. Harry happened to look along the edge of the wood while he was away. At the edge of the wood, under the big pine with the forked trunk, he saw a flash of maroon jumper. It was talking to a girl with a dark, shiny bob, wearing a green cloak. The girl pressed something into Ron's hand. Then she was gone among the trees. Ron came back along the trees with leaves in his hair, looking enormously pleased with himself.

Harry grinned into his last sandwich. He didn't say a word. From a distance, he reminded himself. No poking his nose in.

'Harry,' said Ron, a little later, far too casually. He was lying on his back, studying the map Mr Roberts had given his father. He had drawn a very small cross on it, in pencil, at the top of the wood. 'If you were a girl… would you rather have chocolates, or flowers?'

'Chocolates,' said Harry at once. 'Definitely. She'll love them.'

Ron went scarlet.

'They're not for Pansy.'

'Course they're not.'

'They're *not*.' Ron rolled over, then gave Harry a long, critical look. 'You're not going to wear that tonight, are you? After the match?'

Harry looked down at his green jumper. 'What's wrong with it?'

'Nothing. It's a big occasion, that's all. You want to look smart. In case.'

'In case what?'

'Just in case,' said Ron darkly. He went back to his map.

Hermione had been sitting very close beside Harry all afternoon, reading an old copy of *Which Broomstick* that Perkins had left in the

tent. Harry noticed that she had stopped turning the pages. She was looking at Ron over the top of it with narrowed eyes. Ron didn't look up. He seemed to have decided that the campsite map was the most interesting thing he had ever seen.

By dusk the whole campsite was humming. The air itself seemed to quiver. As night came down over the waiting thousands, the last pretence of being Muggles went with the daylight. The Ministry appeared to have given up altogether. Nobody was even trying to stop the magic breaking out on all sides now. Every few feet a salesman popped up out of nowhere, with a tray round his neck or a cart full of the most astonishing things. There were glowing rosettes that shrieked the names of the players, green ones for Ireland, red ones for Bulgaria. There were tall green hats sprouting shamrocks that danced. There were Bulgarian scarves with real roaring lions on them, along with flags that played the national anthem whenever you waved them. There were little model Firebolts that could actually fly, as well as figures of famous players no taller than your finger, which strutted up and down your hand, admiring themselves.

'Been saving my pocket money all summer for this,' Ron told Harry, as they went among the salesmen with Hermione, buying souvenirs.

Ron came away with a hat covered in dancing shamrocks, along with a huge green rosette. He bought a tiny Viktor Krum as well. It marched up and down Ron's palm, glaring at the rosette over its head.

It was while Ron was paying that Harry saw Mr Malfoy. He was a good way off across the crowd, a tall figure with long hair so fair it was nearly white, his hand resting on a cane with a silver top. Harry's stomach gave a little jump. He looked round Mr Malfoy at

once for a smaller, silver-blonde head. There wasn't one. Mr Malfoy turned to look their way.

At the very next cart, somebody moved sharply in the opposite direction. Harry caught a swish of something pale out of the corner of his eye, a raincoat, perhaps. There was the click of a lighter snapping shut. When he looked properly, there was only a fat witch buying a Bulgarian scarf. Mr Malfoy had gone too, swallowed up by the crowd.

'Wow, look at these!' said Harry, forgetting all about it. He dashed across to a cart heaped with things that resembled brass binoculars, except that every pair bristled with strange little knobs and dials.

'Omnioculars,' said the saleswizard eagerly. 'You can replay action… slow everything down… and they flash up a play by play breakdown if you need it. Bargain, ten Galleons each.'

'Wish I hadn't bought this now,' said Ron. He waved a hand at his dancing shamrock hat, gazing longingly at the Omnioculars.

Harry knew what he had to do. He was going to buy Ron that computer. Before he did, though, he could do this much at least, for his very best mate.

'Three pairs,' Harry told the saleswizard firmly.

'No… don't bother,' said Ron, going red. Ron had always been sensitive about money. Harry's parents had left him a small fortune, while Ron had a dancing hat and a family of nine.

'You won't be getting anything for Christmas,' Harry told him, pushing Omnioculars into his hands and Hermione's. 'For about ten years, mind.'

'Fair enough,' said Ron, grinning.

'Oooh, thanks, Harry,' said Hermione.

She held the Omnioculars against her chest with both hands. She looked at Harry as though he had just given her a ring. As far as Hermione was concerned, he very nearly had.

'And I'll get us some programmes, look…' added Hermione.

Their money bags were a good deal lighter as they went back to the tents. Bill, Charlie and Ginny were all sporting green rosettes too. Mr Weasley was carrying an Irish flag. Fred and George had no souvenirs at all, since they had given Bagman every last bit of their gold.

Then, somewhere beyond the wood, a deep, booming gong sounded. All at once, green and red lanterns blazed into life in the trees, lighting a path up to the field.

'It's time!' said Mr Weasley, every bit as excited as the rest of them. 'Come on, let's go!'

Nobody noticed, as the Weasleys set off up the lantern path with Harry in the middle of them, that the darkness between two of the trees smelt faintly of cigarettes. Nor did anybody see it move, a moment later, to follow them.