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

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

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

This boy was another good reason for keeping the Potters away; they didn't want Dudley mixing with a child like that.





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

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

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

It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of something peculiar – a cat reading a map. For a second, Mr Dursley didn't realise what he had seen – then he jerked his head around to look again. There was a tabby cat standing on the corner of Privet Drive, but there wasn't a map in sight. What could he have been thinking of? It must have been a trick of the light.

Mr Dursley blinked and stared at the cat. It stared back. As Mr Dursley drove around the corner and up the road, he watched the cat in his mirror.



Mrs Dursley sipped her tea through pursed lips. Mr Dursley wondered whether he dared tell her he'd heard the name 'Potter'. He decided he didn't dare. Instead he said, as casually as he could, 'Their son – he'd be about Dudley's age now, wouldn't he?'

'I suppose so,' said Mrs Dursley stiffly.

'What's his name again? Howard, isn't it?'

'Harry. Nasty, common name, if you ask me.'

'Oh, yes,' said Mr Dursley, his heart sinking horribly. 'Yes, I quite agree.'

He didn't say another word on the subject as they went upstairs to bed. While Mrs Dursley was in the bathroom, Mr Dursley crept to the bedroom window and peered down into the front garden. The cat was still there. It was staring down Privet Drive as though it was waiting for something.

Was he imagining things? Could all this have anything to do with the Potters? If it did … if it got out that they were related to a pair of – well, he didn't think he could bear it.

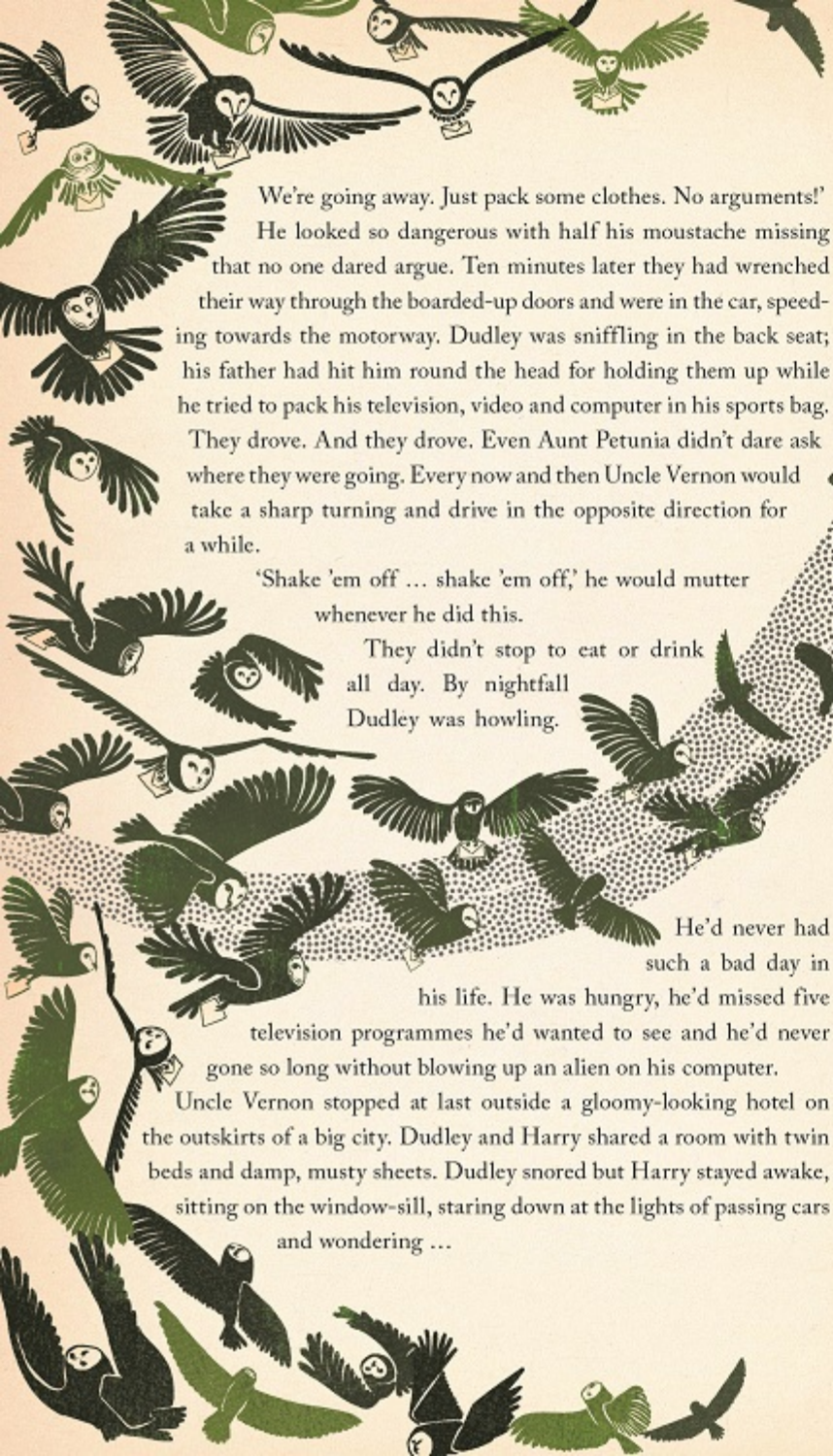
The Dursleys got into bed. Mrs Dursley fell asleep quickly but Mr Dursley lay awake, turning it all over in his mind. His last, comforting thought before he fell asleep was that even if the Potters *were* involved, there was no reason for them to come near him and Mrs Dursley. The Potters knew very well what he and Petunia thought about them and their kind … He couldn't see how he and Petunia could get mixed up in anything that might be going on. He yawned and turned over. It couldn't affect *them* …

How very wrong he was.

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







We're going away. Just pack some clothes. No arguments!'

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

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

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

They didn't stop to eat or drink all day. By nightfall Dudley was howling.

He'd never had such a bad day in his life. He was hungry, he'd missed five television programmes he'd wanted to see and he'd never gone so long without blowing up an alien on his computer.

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

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

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

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

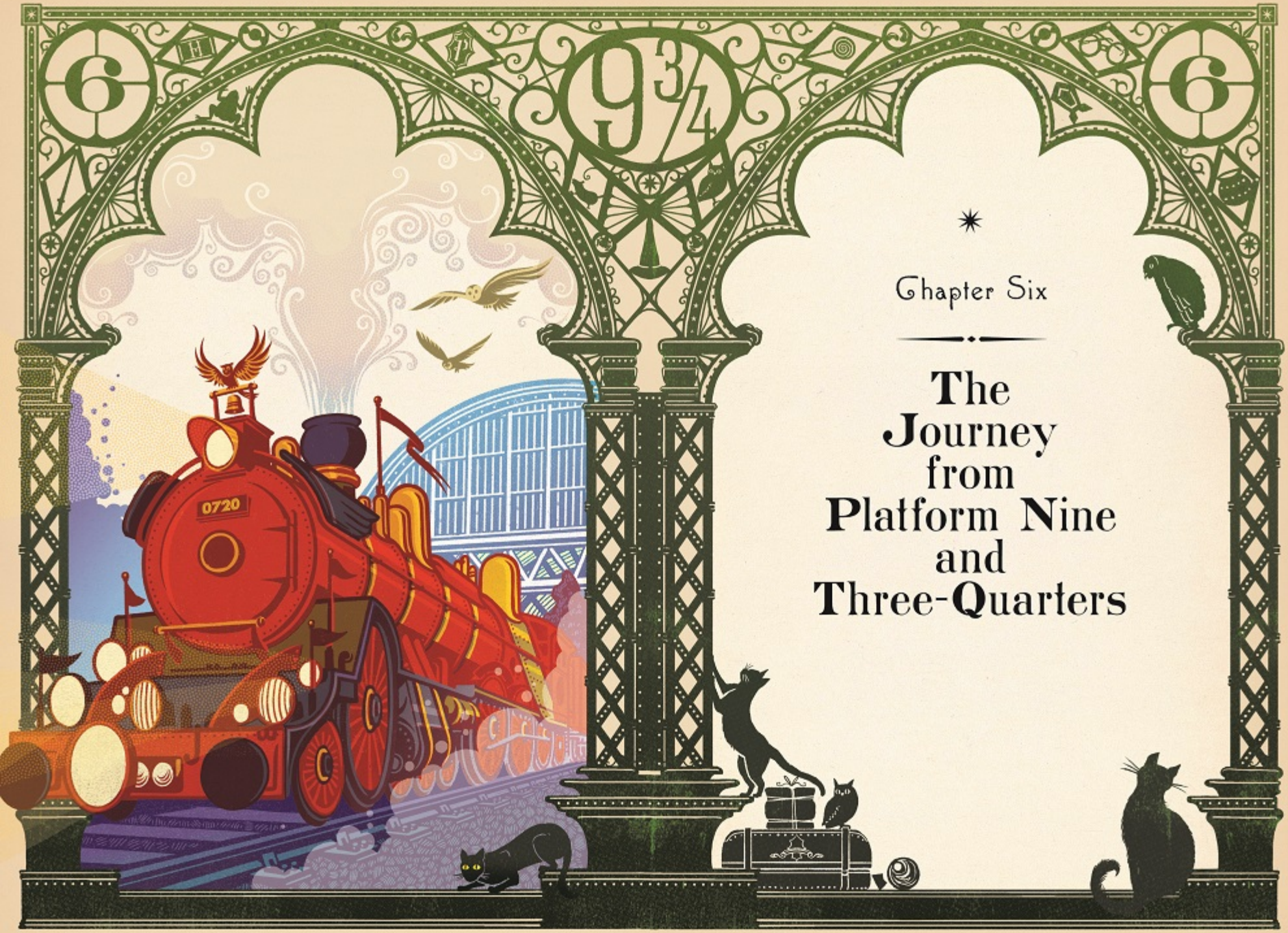
MR H. POTTER
Room 17
Railview Hotel
COKEWORTH

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

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

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

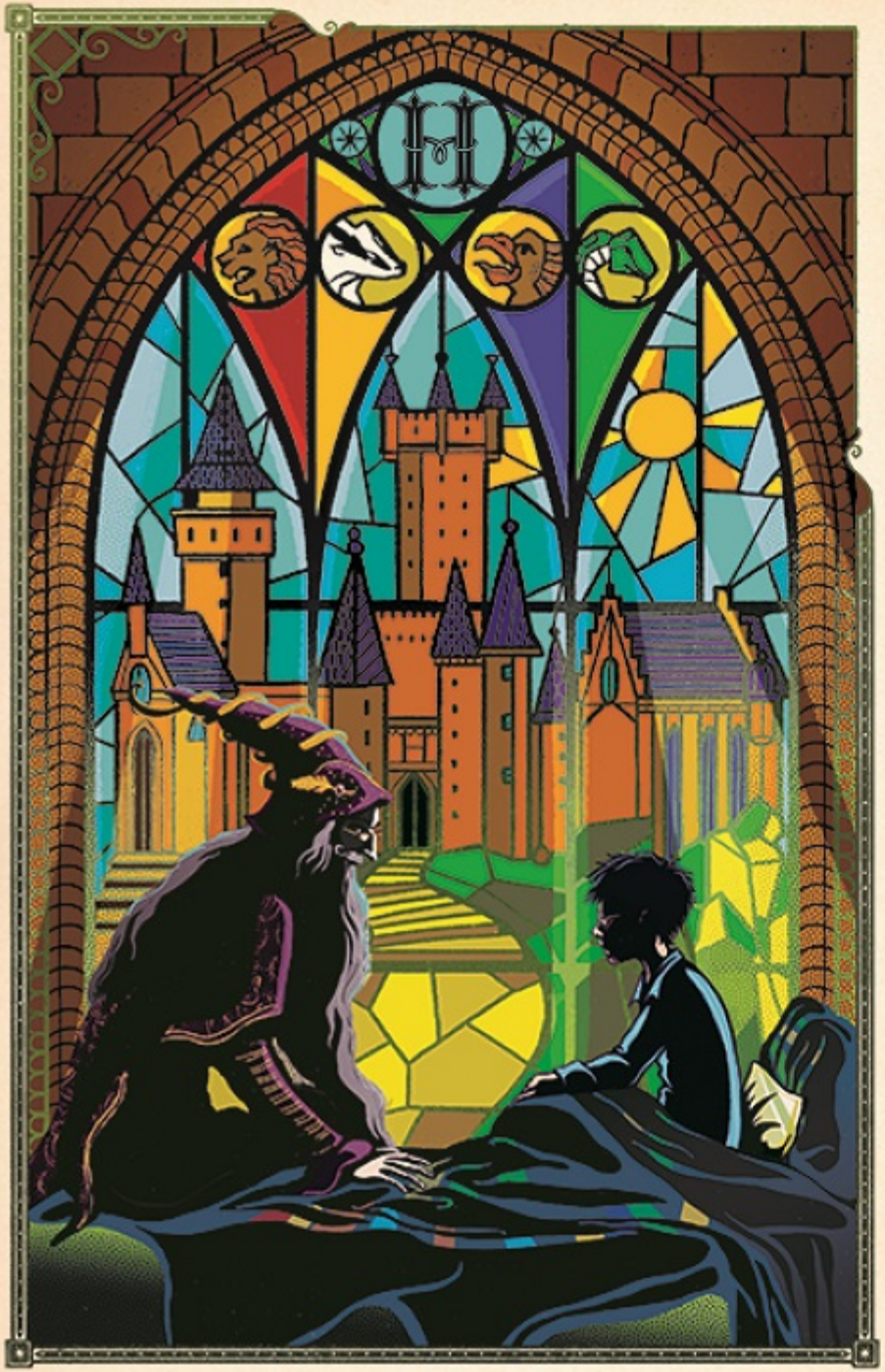





Chapter Six

# The Journey from Platform Nine and Three-Quarters







I believe your friends Misters Fred and George Weasley were responsible for trying to send you a lavatory seat. No doubt they thought it would amuse you. Madam Pomfrey, however, felt it might not be very hygienic, and confiscated it.'

'How long have I been in here?'

'Three days. Mr Ronald Weasley and Miss Granger will be most relieved you have come round, they have been extremely worried.'

'But sir, the Stone –'

'I see you are not to be distracted. Very well, the Stone. Professor Quirrell did not manage to take it from you. I arrived in time to prevent that, although you were doing very well on your own, I must say.'

'You got there? You got Hermione's owl?'

'We must have crossed in mid-air. No sooner had I reached London than it became clear to me that the place I should be was the one I had just left. I arrived just in time to pull Quirrell off you –'

'It was *you*.'

'I feared I might be too late.'

'You nearly were, I couldn't have kept him off the Stone much longer –'

'Not the Stone, boy, you – the effort involved nearly killed you. For one terrible moment there, I was afraid it had. As for the Stone, it has been destroyed.'

'Destroyed?' said Harry blankly. 'But your friend – Nicolas Flamel –'

'Oh, you know about Nicolas?' said Dumbledore, sounding quite delighted. 'You *did* do the thing properly, didn't you? Well, Nicolas and I have had a little chat and agreed it's all for the best.'

'But that means he and his wife will die, won't they?'

'They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order and then, yes, they will die.'

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry's face.

'To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas