

Diagon Alley

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Leaky Cauldron had suddenly gone completely still and silent.

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

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

'Welcome back, Mr Potter, welcome back.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'I've seen you before!' said Harry, as Dedalus Diggle's top hat fell off in his excitement.

'You once bowed to me in a shop.'

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

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

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

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

'P-P-Potter,' stammered Quirrell, grasping Harry's hand, 'C-can't t-tell you how p-pleased I am to meet you.'

'What sort of magic do you teach, Professor Quirrell?'

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

But the others wouldn't let Professor Quirrell keep Harry to himself. It took almost ten minutes to get away from them all. At last, Hagrid managed to make himself heard over the babble. 'Must get on - lots ter buy. Come on, Harry.' Doris Crockford shook Harry's hand one last time, and Hagrid led them through the bar and out into a small, walled courtyard, where there was nothing but a dustbin and a few weeds.

Hagrid grinned at Harry.

'Told yeh, didn't I? Told yeh you was famous. Even Professor Quirrell was tremblin' to meet yeh- mind you, he's usually tremblin'.'

'Is he always that nervous?'

'Oh, yeah. Poor bloke. Brilliant mind. He was fine while he was studyin' outta books but then he took a year off ter get some first hand experience... They say he met vampires in the Black Forest and there was a nasty bit o' trouble with a hag- never been th esame since. Scared of the students, scared of his own subject- now, where's me umbrella? Vampires? Hags? Harry's head was swimming. Hagrid, meanwhile, was counting bricks in the wall above the dustbin.

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

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

The brick he had touched quivered- it wriggled- in the middle, a small hole appeared- it grew wider and wider- a second later they were facing an archway large enough even for Hagrid, an archway onto a cobbled street which twisted and turned out of sight.

'Welcome,' said Hagrid, 'to Diagon Alley.'