

Leaving the Dursleys

Harry Potter strode confidently down Privet Drive.

Reaching his destination, he stopped in front of Number Four and just gazed at the house. The lawn that Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia had made him cut twice a week, that blasted car they made him wash almost daily, the flowerbeds that were forever needing to be weeded. His gaze went slightly vacant as his memory traveled inward. Mowing, washing, weeding, cooking, cleaning . . . The list of work they put him through was almost endless.

And for what? Something approaching starvation level sustenance and constant verbal and mental abuse. The physical abuse was there as well, but it was less than continuous. After all, he couldn't do chores if his arm was broken.

There was a purpose to it, he reminded himself. The protection his blood relatives unknowingly and unwillingly gave him allowed him to live long enough to see the end of the War. That he'd actually made it this far was still a source of amazement for him.

Shaking himself out of his morbid, nostalgic mood, he stepped to the door and rang the bell.

It'd been four years after all. Might as well act as a decent guest for the short time he was going to be here. For that same reason, he'd worn Muggle clothing for the visit.

Dudley opened the door. When he saw who it was, his jaw dropped.

Harry raised an amused eyebrow. "Surely you haven't forgotten me, Cousin?" he asked calmly, brushing past his still large relative. "By the by, I see that congratulations are in order. I see you're finally needing to use a razor."

Standing in the living room, Harry gazed around for a moment. Everything was exactly as he'd last seen it. It still amazed him how little the War had actually affected the Muggles. His roving eyes fell upon the door to the cupboard under the stairs. He paused and, other than a slight tightening around his eyes, not a hint of his emotions showed.

"Wha – What are you doing here, freak?" asked Dudley in a delayed question.

Harry sighed and turned. "I've returned to pick up the items that I left. After all, circumstances forced me to leave so abruptly that I left behind -"

"YOU!" bellowed Uncle Vernon, who'd just made an appearance from the direction of the kitchen. "What in blazes do you think you're doing, coming back here, you good for nothing freak?"

"As I was telling your son, Dursley, I've returned to collect my remaining belongings. I assure you that I'll gladly leave as quickly as possible once I've collected my things."

"What makes you think we kept any of it, you insolent brat?"

Not a question about where he'd been or how he was. No word about how things had gone in his absence. Not that Harry expected better, though.

"I'm sure you tried to dispose of it or destroy it," he nodded in acknowledgement. "Now where is it?" He wasn't in the least bit concerned. The series of charms that Professor Flitwick had taught them in his sixth year (and immediately been cast upon all of his valued possessions) were proof against crushing, cutting, fires, and attempts to throw it away. Wonderful thing, magic.

Harry briefly entertained himself with a fantasy of Uncle Vernon futilely trying to burn his trunk. That Flame Repelling Charm would have driven him absolutely nutters.

Seeing he couldn't get his good for nothing nephew's temper to rise, Vernon Dursley grunted and indicated the cupboard that had doubled as Harry's bedroom for close to ten years.

"Figures," Harry muttered. He abruptly clapped his hands and called, "Dobby!"

With a sharp crack, Dobby the house-elf appeared. Vernon and Dudley jumped at the unexpected arrival. "Harry Potter called, sir?" Dobby asked.

"Yes." With merely a gesture, the doors to the cupboard sprang open. "My belongings should be in there. Please take them back to the Manor."

Dobby bowed. "As Master says." He rushed across the room and began sorting through the various detritus the Dursleys had dropped overtop his school things. Anything that wasn't Harry's got summarily pitched into the hallway.

"WHAT is THAT?" Vernon loudly asked, staring at the eclectically dressed house-elf.

"That is Dobby the house-elf," He's a friend and an employee of mine. I'd be very careful about doing anything to annoy him. He's quite powerful. If he'd a mind to, I doubt I could stop him from killing me."

Dobby's head poked back out of the cupboard immediately, his eyes huge. "Oh, NO, sir. Dobby would never harm Harry Potter, sir. He's a great wizard, is Harry Potter."

Harry smiled as he held up one hand. "I know that you would never harm me, Dobby. I'm just explaining to my Uncle Vernon that you're a powerfully magical being. He's never met a house-elf."

Dobby's eyes snapped over to stare with revulsion at Vernon. "This is Master's Uncle Vernon?" Without waiting for a reply, he dove back into his assigned task.

Vernon, naturally enough, didn't like how that sounded. "Now see here, boy! What have you been telling that . . . that THING about me?"

"Just the truth."

"The TRUTH? What do you know of the truth, freak? That we took your ungrateful self in, gave you food and shelter when we had no reason to? That we tolerated your miserable existence and your unnatural ways? Is THAT what you told this THING?"

Dobby's head slowly came back out, fire snapping in his eyes. "You will not speak to Harry Potter in that way!" he warned in a cold (for him) voice.

"Why NOT?" Vernon roared. "He's nothing but a miserable, worthless," he sputtered for a moment, trying to find a sufficiently vile expression, before finally ending with, "NOTHING!"

One curious facet of house-elf psychology is their fascination and adoration of titles. Considering his role in the War, Harry Potter had more than a few.

Pulling himself up to all two and a half feet of his height, Dobby the house-elf, self-assigned protector and follower of Harry Potter, began his recitation in one long breath. "Master is Head of the House of Potter, Heir of the House of Gryffindor, Inheritor of the House of Black, The Boy-Who-Lived, Defeater of Voldemort, Order of Merlin First Class, Elder of the Wizengamot, Member of International Confederation of Wizards, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, youngest Quidditch player at Hogwarts in a century, former Gryffindor Quidditch Captain, former Hogwarts Quidditch Cup winner, has TWO Chocolate Frog portraits, and was voted in 'Witch Weekly' as Britain's most eligible bachelor for three years." Dobby turned to Harry and beamed in adulation.

Harry suppressed a wince. Dobby just HAD to include that last one, didn't he?

Vernon had his hands on his knees, leaning forward and laughing so hard that he couldn't stand. "Wizz-in-ga-mat?" he gasped out. "Chocolate Frogs? Witch Weekly's el – eligible bach – bachelor?" he wheezed out before falling over in booming, asphyxiating laughter.

Giving him a disgusted look, Dobby returned to his assigned task with gusto.

Harry waited patiently until Vernon could speak again.

"Chocolate frogs?" Dudley asked hopefully. Everyone ignored him.

Old pans, oversized clothing, and the occasional broken toy continued to fly out of the cupboard.

Wiping tears from his face, Vernon finally heaved himself upright. Giving a disgusted look at the mess Dobby was creating, he growled to Harry, "I demand that you pay for our storage of your junk."

Harry rolled his eyes. Reaching into his money bag, he extracted a galleon and flipped it to Vernon.

"What's this, boy?" he asked, inspecting it closely.

"It's called a galleon," Harry answered mildly.

"Is this . . . real gold?" Vernon asked, not even having heard Harry's previous answer. His eyes were nearly touching the coin, he was inspecting it so closely.

"Yes, it's real gold. Worth a bit over fifty pounds. It's wizard money," he added.

Vernon's face screwed up weirdly. Harry knew Vernon's revulsion for anything magical would create a huge conflict for him. He'd want the money, but he wouldn't like its wizardly origin.

Taking the choice from him, Harry said, "Keep it, I have plenty more where that came from."

Once the implications sank into Vernon's greedy mind, he snapped his head up, a gleam in his eye. "Boy, I demand –"

Harry shook his head. "I've already overpaid you for the oh- so-generous hospitality you paid me for sixteen years." He turned his head, "Dobby, all finished?"

Dobby poked his head out of the now quiet cupboard. "Yes, Harry Potter, sir. All of sir's belongings are at the Manor."

Harry nodded. "Thank you. I'll be back presently."

Dobby bowed and disappeared with a sharp crack.

"Now see here, boy," Vernon began again.

Harry held up a hand. "Don't bother. I'm leaving, never to return, Dursley. Which, I'm sure, is exactly what you want anyway." He stepped over to the front door and pulled it open. Without turning, he said, "You heard that list that Dobby gave. Of all my titles, salutations, and honorifics, there are two that I treasure most, Dursley. They're terms you'll even recognize." He turned and looked Vernon in the eye. "Could you guess what they are?"

"No," Vernon growled cautiously.

"Husband and father-to-be. Have a good life." With that, Harry Potter turned and left Number Four, Privet Drive for the last time.