Harry opened his eyes. If they had reached water-skiing budgerigars, there would be nothing else worth hearing. He rolled cautiously on to his front and raised himself on to his knees and elbows, preparing to crawl out from under the window. He had moved about two inches when several things happened in quick succession.

A loud, echoing *crack* broke the sleepy silence like a gunshot; a cat streaked out from under a parked car and flew out of sight; a shriek, a bellowed oath and the sound of breaking china came from the Dursleys’ living room, and as though this was the signal Harry had been waiting for he jumped to his feet, at the same time pulling from the waistband of his jeans a thin wooden wand as if he were unsheathing a sword – but before he could draw himself up to full height, the top of his head collided with the Dursleys’ open window. The resultant *crash* made Aunt Petunia scream even louder.

Harry felt as though his head had been split in two. Eyes streaming, he swayed, trying to focus on the street to spot the source of the noise, but he had barely staggered upright when two large purple hands reached through the open window and closed tightly around his throat.

*‘Put - it - away!’* Uncle Vernon snarled into Harry’s ear. ‘*Now! Before – anyone – sees!’*

‘Get - off - me!’ Harry gasped. For a few second they struggled, Harry pulling at his uncle’s sausage-like fingers with his left hand, his right maintaining a firm grip on his raised wand, then, as the pain in the top of Harry’s head gave a particularly nasty throb, Uncle Vernon yelped and released Harry as though he had received an electric shock. Some invisible force seemed to have surged through his nephew, making him impossible to hold.

Panting, Harry fell forwards over the hydrangea bush, straightened up and stared around. There was no sign of what had caused the loud cracking noise, but there were several faces peering through various nearby windows. Harry stuffed his wand hastily back into his jeans and tried to look innocent.

‘Lovely evening!’ shouted Uncle Vernon, waving at Mrs Number Seven opposite, who was glaring from behind her net curtains. ‘Did you hear that car backfire just now? Gave Petunia and me quite a turn!’

He continued to grin in a horrible, manic way until all the curious neighbours had disappeared from their various windows, then the grin became a grimace of rage as he beckoned Harry back towards him. Harry moved a few steps closer, taking care to stop just short of the point at which Uncle Vernon’s outstretched hands could resume their strangling.

‘What the devil do you mean by it boy?’ asked Uncle Vernon in a croaky voice that trembled with fury.

‘What do I mean by what?’ said Harry coldly. He kept looking left and right up the street, still hoping to see the person who had made the cracking noise.

‘Making a racket like a starting pistol right outside our -’

‘I didn’t make that noise,’ said Harry firmly.

Aunt Petunia’s thin, horsy face now appeared beside Uncle Vernon’s wide, purple one. She looked livid.

‘Why were you lurking under our window?

‘Yes – yes, good point, Petunia! What were you doing under our window boy?’