Harry listened to a jingle about Fruit ‘n’ Bran breakfast cereal while he watched Mrs Figg, a batty cat-loving old lady from nearby Wisteria Walk, amble slowly past. She was frowning and muttering to herself. Harry was very pleased he was concealed behind the bush, as Mrs Figg had recently taken to asking him round for tea whenever she met him in the street. She had rounded the corner and vanished from view before Uncle Vernon’s voice floated out of the windows again.

‘Dudders out for tea?’

‘At the Polkisses’,’ said Aunt Petunia fondly. ‘He’s got so many little friends, he’s so popular…’

Harry supressed a snort with difficulty. The Dursleys really were astonishingly stupid about their son, Dudley. They had swallowed his dim-witted lies about having tea with a different member of his gang every night of the summer holidays. Harry knew perfectly well that Dudley had not been to tea anywhere, he and his gang had spent every evening vandalising the play park, smoking on street corners and throwing stones at passing cars and children. Harry had seen seen them at it during his evening walks around Little Whinging, he had spent most of the holidays wandering the streets, scavanging newspapers from bins along the way.

The opening notes of the music that heralded the seven o’clock news reached Harry’s ears and his stomach turned over. Perhaps tonight – after a month of waiting – would be the night.

‘*Record numbers of stranded holiday makers fill airports as the Spanish baggage-handlers’ strike reaches its second week-‘*

‘Give ‘em a lifelong siesta, I would,’ snarled Uncle Vernon over the end of the newsreader’s sentence, but no matter: outside in the flowerbed, Harry’s stomach seemed to unclench. If anything had happened, it would surely have been the first item on the news, death and destruction were more important than stranded holidaymakers.

He let out a long, slow breath and stared up at the brilliant blue sky. Every day this summer had been same: the tension, the expectation, the temporary relief, and then the mounting tension again… and always, growing more insistent all the time, the question of *why* nothing had happened yet.

He kept listening, just in case there was some small clue, not recognised for what it really was by the Muggles – an unexplained disappearance, perhaps, or some strange accident… but the baggage-handlers’ strike was followed by news about the drought in the Southeast (‘I hope he’s listening next door!’ bellowed Uncle Vernon. ‘Him with his sprinklers on at three in the morning!’), then a helicopter that had almost crashed in a field in Surrey, then a famous actress’s divorce from her famous husband (‘As if we’re interested in their sordid affair,’ sniffed Aunt Petunia, who had followed the case obsessively in every magazine she could lay her bony hands on).