Platform Nine and Three-Quarters Extract

Well, there you are, boy. Platform nine - platform platform should be somewhere in the middle, but they don't seem to have built it yet, do they?"

He was quite right, of course. There was a big plastic number nine over one platform and a big plastic number ten over the one

next to it, and in the middle, nothing at all.

'Have a good term,' said Uncle Vernon with an even nastier smile. He left without another word. Harry turned and saw the Dursleys drive away. All three of them were laughing. Harry's mouth went rather dry. What on earth was he going to do? He was starting to attract a lot of funny looks, because of Hedwig. He'd have to ask someone.

He stopped a passing guard, but didn't dare mention platform nine and three-quarters. The guard had never heard of Hogwarts and when Harry couldn't even tell him what part of the country it was in, he started to get annoyed, as though Harry was being stupid on purpose. Getting desperate, Harry asked for the train that left at eleven o'clock, but the guard said there wasn't one. In the end the guard strode away, muttering about time-wasters. Harry was now trying hard not to panic. According to the large clock over the arrivals board, he had ten minutes left to get on the train to Hogwarts and he had no idea how to do it; he was stranded in the middle of a station with a trunk he could hardly lift, a pocket full of wizard money and a large owl.

Hagrid must have forgotten to tell him something you had to do, like tapping the third brick on the left to get into Diagon Alley. He wondered if he should get out his wand and start

tapping the ticket box between platforms nine and ten.

At that moment a group of people passed just behind him and he caught a few words of what they were saying.

'- packed with Muggles, of course -'

Harry swung round. The speaker was a plump woman who was talking to four boys, all with flaming red hair. Each of them was pushing a trunk like Harry's in front of him - and they had an owl.

Heart hammering, Harry pushed his trolley after them. They stopped and so did he, just near enough to hear what they were saying.

'Now, what's the platform number?' said the boys' mother.

'Nine and three-quarters!' piped a small girl, also red-headed,

who was holding her hand. 'Mum, can't I go ...' ho was holding her hand. Ginny, now be quiet. All right, Percy, You're not old enough, Ginny, now be quiet.

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What looked like the oldest boy marched towards platforms What looked like the watched, careful not to blink in case he nine and ten. Harry watched the divide between case he nine and ten. Harry the boy reached the divide between the two missed it – but just as the boy reached the divide between the two missed it - but just as the last rucksack had cleared and front of platforms, a large cross of him, and by the time the last rucksack had cleared away, the boy

had vanished.

'Fred, you next,' the plump woman said. Trea, you next, the Progress, said the boy. 'Honestly, woman, call yourself our mother? Can't you tell I'm George?'

'Only joking, I am Fred,' said the boy, and off he went. His twin called after him to hurry up, and he must have done, because a second later, he had gone - but how had he done it?

Now the third brother was walking briskly towards the ticket barrier - he was almost there - and then, quite suddenly, he wasn't anywhere.

There was nothing else for it.

'Excuse me,' Harry said to the plump woman.

'Hullo, dear,' she said. 'First time at Hogwarts? Ron's new, too.'

She pointed at the last and youngest of her sons. He was tall, thin and gangling, with freckles, big hands and feet and a long

'Yes,' said Harry. 'The thing is - the thing is, I don't know how to -'

'How to get on to the platform?' she said kindly, and Harry

'Not to worry,' she said. 'All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous. Go on, go now before Ron.'

'Er - OK,' said Harry.

He pushed his trolley round and stared at the barrier. It looked very solid.

He started to walk towards it. People jostled him on their way to platforms nine and ten. Harry walked more quickly. He was going to smash right into that ticket box and then he'd be in trouble - leaning forward on his trolley he broke into a heavy run - the barrier was coming nearer and nearer - he wouldn't be able to stop – the trolley was out of control – he was a foot away – he closed his eyes ready for the crash -

It didn't come ... he kept on running ... he opened his eyes.

A scarlet steam engine was waiting next to a platform packed with people. A sign overhead said Hogwarts Express, 11 o'clock. Harry looked behind him and saw a wrought-iron archway where the ticket box had been, with the words Platform Nine and Three-Quarters on it. He had done it.

Smoke from the engine drifted over the heads of the chattering crowd, while cats of every colour wound here and there between their legs. Owls hooted to each other in a disgruntled sort of way

over the babble and the scraping of heavy trunks.

The first few carriages were already packed with students, some hanging out of the window to talk to their families, some fighting over seats. Harry pushed his trolley off down the platform in search of an empty seat. He passed a round-faced boy who was saying, 'Gran, I've lost my toad again.'

'Oh, Neville,' he heard the old woman sigh.

A boy with dreadlocks was surrounded by a small crowd.

'Give us a look, Lee, go on.'

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The boy lifted the lid of a box in his arms and the people around him shrieked and yelled as something inside poked out a long, hairy leg.

Harry pressed on through the crowd until he found an empty compartment near the end of the train. He put Hedwig inside first and then started to shove and heave his trunk towards the train door. He tried to lift it up the steps but could hardly raise one end and twice he dropped it painfully on his foot.

'Want a hand?' It was one of the red-haired twins he'd followed through the ticket box.

'Yes, please,' Harry panted.

'Oy, Fred! C'mere and help!'

With the twins' help, Harry's trunk was at last tucked away in a corner of the compartment.

'Thanks,' said Harry, pushing his sweaty hair out of his eyes.

'What's that?' said one of the twins suddenly, pointing at Harry's lightning scar.

'Blimey,' said the other twin. 'Are you -?'

'He is,' said the first twin. 'Aren't you?' he added to Harry.