

Extract from Ch. 2 of **Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone** by JK Rowling

The Vanishing Glass

It was a very sunny Saturday and the zoo was crowded with families. The Dursleys bought Dudley and Piers large chocolate ice creams at the entrance and then, because the smiling lady in the van had asked Harry what he wanted before they could hurry him away, they bought him a cheap lemon ice pop. It wasn't bad, either, Harry thought, licking it as they watched a gorilla scratching its head who looked remarkably like Dudley, except that it wasn't blond.

Harry had the best morning he'd had in a long time. He was careful to walk a little way apart from the Dursleys so that Dudley and Piers, who were starting to get bored with the animals by lunchtime, wouldn't fall back on their favourite hobby of hitting him. They ate in the zoo restaurant, and when Dudley had a tantrum because his knickerbocker glory didn't have enough ice cream on top, Uncle Vernon bought him another one and Harry was allowed to finish the first.

Harry felt, afterward, that he should have known it was all too good to last.

After lunch they went to the reptile house. It was cool and dark in there, with lit windows all along the walls. Behind the glass, all sorts of lizards and snakes were crawling and slithering over bits of wood and stone. Dudley and Piers wanted to see huge, poisonous cobras and thick, man-crushing pythons. Dudley quickly found the largest snake in the place. It could have wrapped its body twice around Uncle Vernon's car and crushed it into a trash can — but at the moment it didn't look in the mood. In fact, it was fast asleep.

Dudley stood with his nose pressed against the glass, staring at the glistening brown coils.

"Make it move," he whined at his father. Uncle Vernon tapped on the glass, but the snake didn't budge.

"Do it again," Dudley ordered. Uncle Vernon rapped the glass smartly with his knuckles, but the snake just snoozed on.

"This is boring," Dudley moaned. He shuffled away.

Harry moved in front of the tank and looked intently at the snake. He wouldn't have been surprised if it had died of boredom itself — no company except stupid people drumming their fingers on the glass trying to disturb it all day long. It was worse than having a cupboard as a bedroom, where the only visitor was Aunt Petunia

hammering on the door to wake you up; at least he got to visit the rest of the house.

The snake suddenly opened its beady eyes. Slowly, very slowly, it raised its head until its eyes were on a level with Harry's.

It winked.

Harry stared. Then he looked quickly around to see if anyone was watching. They weren't. He looked back at the snake and winked, too.

The snake jerked its head toward Uncle Vernon and Dudley, then raised its eyes to the ceiling. It gave Harry a look that said quite plainly:

"I get that all the time."

"I know," Harry murmured through the glass, though he wasn't sure the snake could hear him. "It must be really annoying."

The snake nodded vigorously.

"Where do you come from, anyway?" Harry asked.

The snake jabbed its tail at a little sign next to the glass. Harry peered at it.

Boa Constrictor, Brazil.

"Was it nice there?"

The boa constrictor jabbed its tail at the sign again and Harry read on: This specimen was bred in the zoo. "Oh, I see — so you've never been to Brazil?"

As the snake shook its head, a deafening shout behind Harry made both of them jump. "DUDLEY! MR. DURSLEY! COME AND LOOK AT THIS SNAKE! YOU WON'T BELIEVE WHAT IT'S DOING!"

Dudley came waddling toward them as fast as he could.

"Out of the way, you," he said, punching Harry in the ribs. Caught by surprise, Harry fell hard on the concrete floor. What came next happened so fast no one saw how it happened — one second, Piers and Dudley were leaning right up close to the glass, the next, they had leapt back with howls of horror.

Harry sat up and gasped; the glass front of the boa constrictor's tank had vanished. The great snake was uncoiling itself rapidly, slithering out onto the floor. People throughout the reptile house screamed and started running for the exits.

As the snake slid swiftly past him, Harry could have sworn a low, hissing voice said, "Brazil, here I come... Thanksss, amigo."

The keeper of the reptile house was in shock.

"But the glass," he kept saying, "where did the glass go?"

The zoo director himself made Aunt Petunia a cup of strong, sweet tea while he apologized over and over again. Piers and Dudley could only gibber. As far as Harry had seen, the snake hadn't done anything except snap playfully at their heels as it passed, but by the time they were all back in Uncle Vernon's car, Dudley was telling them how it had nearly bitten off his leg, while Piers was swearing it had tried to squeeze him to death. But worst of all, for Harry at least, was Piers calming down enough to say, "Harry was talking to it, weren't you, Harry?"

Uncle Vernon waited until Piers was safely out of the house before starting on Harry. He was so angry he could hardly speak. He managed to say, "Go — cupboard — stay — no meals," before he collapsed into a chair, and Aunt Petunia had to run and get him something to drink.