

"I've never seen Snape look so mean," he told Hermione. "Look — they're off. Ouch!"

Someone had poked Ron in the back of the head. It was Malfoy.

"Oh, sorry, Weasley, didn't see you there."

Malfoy grinned broadly at Crabbe and Goyle.

"Wonder how long Potter's going to stay on his broom this time? Anyone want a bet? What about you, Weasley?"

Ron didn't answer; Snape had just awarded Hufflepuff a penalty because George Weasley had hit a Bludger at him. Hermione, who had all her fingers crossed in her lap, was squinting fixedly at Harry, who was circling the game like a hawk, looking for the Snitch.

"You know how I think they choose people for the Gryffindor team?" said Malfoy loudly a few minutes later, as Snape awarded Hufflepuff another penalty for no reason at all. "It's people they feel sorry for. See, there's Potter, who's got no parents, then there's the Weasleys, who've got no money — you should be on the team, Longbottom, you've got no brains."

Neville went bright red but turned in his seat to face Malfoy.

"I'm worth twelve of you, Malfoy," he stammered.

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle howled with laughter, but Ron, still not daring to take his eyes from the game, said, "You tell him, Neville."

"Longbottom, if brains were gold you'd be poorer than Weasley, and that's saying something."

Ron's nerves were already stretched to the breaking point with anxiety about Harry.

"I'm warning you, Malfoy — one more word —"

"Ron!" said Hermione suddenly, "Harry — !"

"What? Where?"