



QUIDDITCH



taken by Spinnet, who puts it away, no trouble, and we continue play, Gryffindor still in possession.”

It was as Harry dodged another Bludger, which went spinning dangerously past his head, that it happened. His broom gave a sudden, frightening lurch. For a split second, he thought he was going to fall. He gripped the broom tightly with both his hands and knees. He’d never felt anything like that.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly decide to buck their riders off. Harry tried to turn back toward the Gryffindor goal posts — he had half a mind to ask Wood to call time-out — and then he realized that his broom was completely out of his control. He couldn’t turn it. He couldn’t direct it at all. It was zigzagging through the air, and every now and then making violent swishing movements that almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating.

“Slytherin in possession — Flint with the Quaffle — passes Spinnet — passes Bell — hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his nose — only joking, Professor — Slytherins score — oh no . . .”

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed that Harry’s broom was behaving strangely. It was carrying him slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it went.

“Dunno what Harry thinks he’s doing,” Hagrid mumbled. He stared through his binoculars. “If I didn’ know better, I’d say he’d lost control of his broom . . . but he can’t have. . . .”

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over the stands.



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His broom had started to roll over and over, with him only just managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry's broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

"Did something happen to it when Flint blocked him?" Seamus whispered.

"Can't have," Hagrid said, his voice shaking. "Can't nothing interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark magic — no kid could do that to a Nimbus Two Thousand."

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid's binoculars, but instead of looking up at Harry, she started looking frantically at the crowd.

"What are you doing?" moaned Ron, gray-faced.

"I knew it," Hermione gasped, "Snape — look."

Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the middle of the stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Harry and was muttering nonstop under his breath.

"He's doing something — jinxing the broom," said Hermione.

"What should we do?"

"Leave it to me."

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had disappeared. Ron turned the binoculars back on Harry. His broom was vibrating so hard, it was almost impossible for him to hang on much longer. The whole crowd was on its feet, watching, terrified, as the Weasleys flew up to try and pull Harry safely onto one of their brooms, but it was no good — every time they got near him, the broom would jump higher still. They dropped lower and circled beneath him, obviously hoping to catch him if he fell. Marcus



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Flint seized the Quaffle and scored five times without anyone noticing.

“Come on, Hermione,” Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape stood, and was now racing along the row behind him; she didn’t even stop to say sorry as she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst into the row in front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled out her wand, and whispered a few, well-chosen words. Bright blue flames shot from her wand onto the hem of Snape’s robes.

It took perhaps thirty seconds for Snape to realize that he was on fire. A sudden yelp told her she had done her job. Scooping the fire off him into a little jar in her pocket, she scrambled back along the row — Snape would never know what had happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able to clamber back on to his broom.

“Neville, you can look!” Ron said. Neville had been sobbing into Hagrid’s jacket for the last five minutes.

Harry was speeding toward the ground when the crowd saw him clap his hand to his mouth as though he was about to be sick — he hit the field on all fours — coughed — and something gold fell into his hand.

“I’ve got the Snitch!” he shouted, waving it above his head, and the game ended in complete confusion.

“He didn’t *catch* it, he nearly *swallowed* it,” Flint was still howling twenty minutes later, but it made no difference — Harry hadn’t broken any rules and Lee Jordan was still happily shouting the results — Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy points to sixty. Harry heard none of this, though. He was being



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made a cup of strong tea back in Hagrid's hut, with Ron and Hermione.

"It was Snape," Ron was explaining, "Hermione and I saw him. He was cursing your broomstick, muttering, he wouldn't take his eyes off you."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid, who hadn't heard a word of what had gone on next to him in the stands. "Why would Snape do somethin' like that?"

Harry, Ron, and Hermione looked at one another, wondering what to tell him. Harry decided on the truth.

"I found out something about him," he told Hagrid. "He tried to get past that three-headed dog on Halloween. It bit him. We think he was trying to steal whatever it's guarding."

Hagrid dropped the teapot.

"How do you know about Fluffy?" he said.

"*Fluffy?*"

"Yeah — he's mine — bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the pub las' year — I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the —"

"Yes?" said Harry eagerly.

"Now, don't ask me anymore," said Hagrid gruffly. "That's top secret, that is."

"But Snape's trying to *steal* it."

"Rubbish," said Hagrid again. "Snape's a Hogwarts teacher, he'd do nothin' of the sort."

"So why did he just try and kill Harry?" cried Hermione.

The afternoon's events certainly seemed to have changed her mind about Snape.

"I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I've read all about them!"



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You've got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn't blinking at all, I saw him!"

"I'm tellin' yeh, yer wrong!" said Hagrid hotly. "I don' know why Harry's broom acted like that, but Snape wouldn' try an' kill a student! Now, listen to me, all three of yeh — yer meddlin' in things that don' concern yeh. It's dangerous. You forget that dog, an' you forget what it's guardin', that's between Professor Dumbledore an' Nicolas Flamel —"

"Aha!" said Harry, "so there's someone called Nicolas Flamel involved, is there?"

Hagrid looked furious with himself.