



CHAPTER FIFTEEN



"*Fifty?*" Harry gasped — they would lose the lead, the lead he'd won in the last Quidditch match.

"Fifty points *each*," said Professor McGonagall, breathing heavily through her long, pointed nose.

"Professor — please —"

"You *can't* —"

"Don't tell me what I can and can't do, Potter. Now get back to bed, all of you. I've never been more ashamed of Gryffindor students."

A hundred and fifty points lost. That put Gryffindor in last place. In one night, they'd ruined any chance Gryffindor had had for the House Cup. Harry felt as though the bottom had dropped out of his stomach. How could they ever make up for this?

Harry didn't sleep all night. He could hear Neville sobbing into his pillow for what seemed like hours. Harry couldn't think of anything to say to comfort him. He knew Neville, like himself, was dreading the dawn. What would happen when the rest of Gryffindor found out what they'd done?

At first, Gryffindors passing the giant hourglasses that recorded the House points the next day thought there'd been a mistake. How could they suddenly have a hundred and fifty points fewer than yesterday? And then the story started to spread: Harry Potter, the famous Harry Potter, their hero of two Quidditch matches, had lost them all those points, him and a couple of other stupid first years.

From being one of the most popular and admired people at the school, Harry was suddenly the most hated. Even Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs turned on him, because everyone had been longing to see Slytherin lose the House Cup. Everywhere Harry went, people



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pointed and didn't trouble to lower their voices as they insulted him. Slytherins, on the other hand, clapped as he walked past them, whistling and cheering, "Thanks Potter, we owe you one!"

Only Ron stood by him.

"They'll all forget this in a few weeks. Fred and George have lost loads of points in all the time they've been here, and people still like them."

"They've never lost a hundred and fifty points in one go, though, have they?" said Harry miserably.

"Well — no," Ron admitted.

It was a bit late to repair the damage, but Harry swore to himself not to meddle in things that weren't his business from now on. He'd had it with sneaking around and spying. He felt so ashamed of himself that he went to Wood and offered to resign from the Quidditch team.

"Resign?" Wood thundered. "What good'll that do? How are we going to get any points back if we can't win at Quidditch?"

But even Quidditch had lost its fun. The rest of the team wouldn't speak to Harry during practice, and if they had to speak about him, they called him "the Seeker."

Hermione and Neville were suffering, too. They didn't have as bad a time as Harry, because they weren't as well-known, but nobody would speak to them, either. Hermione had stopped drawing attention to herself in class, keeping her head down and working in silence.

Harry was almost glad that the exams weren't far away. All the studying he had to do kept his mind off his misery. He, Ron, and Hermione kept to themselves, working late into the night, trying to remember the ingredients in complicated potions, learn charms



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and spells by heart, memorize the dates of magical discoveries and goblin rebellions. . . .

Then, about a week before the exams were due to start, Harry's new resolution not to interfere in anything that didn't concern him was put to an unexpected test. Walking back from the library on his own one afternoon, he heard somebody whimpering from a classroom up ahead. As he drew closer, he heard Quirrell's voice.

"No — no — not again, please —"

It sounded as though someone was threatening him. Harry moved closer.

"All right — all right —" he heard Quirrell sob.

Next second, Quirrell came hurrying out of the classroom straightening his turban. He was pale and looked as though he was about to cry. He strode out of sight; Harry didn't think Quirrell had even noticed him. He waited until Quirrell's footsteps had disappeared, then peered into the classroom. It was empty, but a door stood ajar at the other end. Harry was halfway toward it before he remembered what he'd promised himself about not meddling.

All the same, he'd have gambled twelve Sorcerer's Stones that Snape had just left the room, and from what Harry had just heard, Snape would be walking with a new spring in his step — Quirrell seemed to have given in at last.

Harry went back to the library, where Hermione was testing Ron on Astronomy. Harry told them what he'd heard.

"Snape's done it, then!" said Ron. "If Quirrell's told him how to break his Anti-Dark Force spell —"

"There's still Fluffy, though," said Hermione.

"Maybe Snape's found out how to get past him without asking Hagrid," said Ron, looking up at the thousands of books sur-



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rounding them. “I bet there’s a book somewhere in here telling you how to get past a giant three-headed dog. So what do we do, Harry?”

The light of adventure was kindling again in Ron’s eyes, but Hermione answered before Harry could.

“Go to Dumbledore. That’s what we should have done ages ago. If we try anything ourselves we’ll be thrown out for sure.”

“But we’ve got no *proof*!” said Harry. “Quirrell’s too scared to back us up. Snape’s only got to say he doesn’t know how the troll got in at Halloween and that he was nowhere near the third floor — who do you think they’ll believe, him or us? It’s not exactly a secret we hate him, Dumbledore’ll think we made it up to get him sacked. Filch wouldn’t help us if his life depended on it, he’s too friendly with Snape, and the more students get thrown out, the better, he’ll think. And don’t forget, we’re not supposed to know about the Stone or Fluffy. That’ll take a lot of explaining.”

Hermione looked convinced, but Ron didn’t.

“If we just do a bit of poking around —”

“No,” said Harry flatly, “we’ve done enough poking around.”

He pulled a map of Jupiter toward him and started to learn the names of its moons.

The following morning, notes were delivered to Harry, Hermione, and Neville at the breakfast table. They were all the same:

Your detention will take place at eleven o’clock tonight.

Meet Mr. Filch in the entrance hall.

Professor M. McGonagall



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Harry had forgotten they still had detentions to do in the furor over the points they'd lost. He half expected Hermione to complain that this was a whole night of studying lost, but she didn't say a word. Like Harry, she felt they deserved what they'd got.

At eleven o'clock that night, they said good-bye to Ron in the common room and went down to the entrance hall with Neville. Filch was already there — and so was Malfoy. Harry had also forgotten that Malfoy had gotten a detention, too.

"Follow me," said Filch, lighting a lamp and leading them outside.

"I bet you'll think twice about breaking a school rule again, won't you, eh?" he said, leering at them. "Oh yes . . . hard work and pain are the best teachers if you ask me. . . . It's just a pity they let the old punishments die out . . . hang you by your wrists from the ceiling for a few days, I've got the chains still in my office, keep 'em well oiled in case they're ever needed. . . . Right, off we go, and don't think of running off, now, it'll be worse for you if you do."

They marched off across the dark grounds. Neville kept sniffing. Harry wondered what their punishment was going to be. It must be something really horrible, or Filch wouldn't be sounding so delighted.

The moon was bright, but clouds scudding across it kept throwing them into darkness. Ahead, Harry could see the lighted windows of Hagrid's hut. Then they heard a distant shout.

"Is that you, Filch? Hurry up, I want ter get started."

Harry's heart rose; if they were going to be working with Hagrid it wouldn't be so bad. His relief must have showed in his face, because Filch said, "I suppose you think you'll be enjoying yourself