

Snape's long-fingered hand clasped his shoulder. "If the time comes early, Harry, you will be ready for it. *We* will be ready for it. Having you at full maturity would help, but I have faith that should the situation call for it, you will rise to the challenge regardless."

Harry leaned back into the firm touch, just for a moment. "I hope you're right."

He wished he could have that kind of faith in himself.

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The seventh of April brought the Hufflepuff versus Slytherin quidditch match — and also a notice in every common room, asking for all students fifth year and up to meet in the Great Hall for an assembly half an hour before dinner. Provided the quidditch match didn't run all day, at least.

Harry was curious, but too excited about quidditch to worry overmuch. If it was something dire, he would have heard about it by now.

Once again, he wore Draco's team hoodie, though it wasn't cold enough to need the scarf to match.

"I want you to win," he told Draco over breakfast, "but not by *too* much. Just a little bit. Then we don't have to get a massive lead over Ravenclaw."

Draco smirked amusedly. "I'm sorry, darling, but if you think I'm not going to do my damndest to make your entire team work your arses off for that cup win, you've got another thing coming. If I can't get that cup myself, I'm sure as hell making sure you've really earned it."

Harry gave an overdramatic sigh. "Why do I love you more when you're an asshole," he despaired. Behind him, Ginny snorted so hard she choked on her pumpkin juice. "Go on, then. Go destroy some badgers." He leaned in for a kiss that was probably toeing the line for appropriate-at-the-breakfast-table, pushing Draco to his feet and smacking him lightly on the arse to shoo him off to join his teammates.

"If we lose the cup because you got lovesick, Harry, I swear to Merlin," Katie warned, and he laughed.

"We won't lose," he said confidently. "Even if Slytherin get a massive point lead. Our team is too good for that."

Katie couldn't argue with that.

With Gryffindor mostly decked out for Hufflepuff solidarity, Harry spent this match with friends from all houses in a corner of the Ravenclaw stands. Slytherin wasn't the fondest of him, since Gryffindor was still their main competition for the cup.

The match didn't last all day, but it stretched a decent way towards lunchtime. Hufflepuff were fierce competition, their keeper working his arse off to block the Slytherin chasers, their beaters surprisingly fearless against Crabbe and Goyle.