

Chapter 9

They'd done it. Gryffindor had won the Quidditch Cup.

Harry didn't think he'd ever stop grinning, the joy bubbling in his chest and threatening to burst out at any moment. He felt a little bad for the smallest moment when he'd seen how heartbroken Draco looked when the Slytherin team landed, but the blond had caught his eye for a second, just long enough to flash half a smile in congratulations. No hard feelings.

Lying in bed now, the celebration party finally dispersed, Harry could feel the bruises on his ribs and shoulders from the Slytherins' more underhanded tactics. Draco had played a fairly clean game, but the rest of his team hadn't been quite so courteous. Harry didn't care. Bruises would fade. They were *champions*. Even the knowledge that he'd be getting his exam timetable in the morning couldn't dampen his spirits. They'd won the cup, and he would get through his exams, and the school year would be over — maybe if Sirius Black was still loose, he'd be able to stay in Diagon Alley again, if being at the Dursleys' was dangerous. They couldn't exactly station dementors in Little Whinging.

A dreamy smile crossed his face at the thought. Maybe, if he was lucky, he'd get his wish.

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Trying to get out of his quidditch-induced euphoria and focus on his upcoming exams was a bit of a stretch, but Harry managed it. He was a little concerned about Hermione, though; every time he saw her she was buried in parchment and books, the dark circles under her eyes getting bigger every day, muttering runes and charms and potions under her breath. He was starting to wonder if she'd crack before exams could even happen. Not to mention her timetable — how could she take two exams at the same time? Even Hermione wasn't that good! She snapped at him every time he asked, though, so Harry left her to it and focused on his own books. Ron made a solid attempt at studying, but his attention span was that of a flobberworm. Harry definitely didn't miss the days where his was the same. For the first time since starting Hogwarts, he felt like *himself* when he was studying. He felt confident in his knowledge. He could focus.

At least, he could until the note about Buckbeak's appeal came through. "I can't believe they're bringing an *executioner*," Ron muttered, scowling at his Potions textbook. "It's like they've already made up their minds!"

"With Malfoy's dad paying them, I'm sure they have," Harry muttered derisively. He might be friends with Draco, but he still hated Lucius Malfoy with a passion. "I'll be back in a minute, I need to go to the library." He'd somehow lost his notes on Cheering charms, and the section in the standard textbook wasn't nearly helpful enough for Harry's liking. To his surprise, Neville fell into stride with him on the way out of the common room.

"Did you say you're going to the library, Harry?" he asked casually. Harry shot him an odd look.