

Chapter 57

Winter had well and truly arrived, and with it, so had the Hogwarts quidditch season. To start things off with a bang, the first match of the year was Gryffindor versus Slytherin. A rivalry that seemed more tense than ever.

The whole Slytherin team were taking great pleasure in hexing the Gryffindor players in the hallways — or trying to, at least. After several weeks of HA meetings, the Gryffindors were light on their feet and quick on the draw; even Vicky Frobisher, their youngest member, had a speedy Shield charm these days.

Naturally, there were no repercussions to these attacks, even the ones that succeeded. Snape was practically encouraging them, and with Umbridge on the prowl no one else dared make much of a fuss. But the spells didn't bother Harry, nor did the whispered threats — he'd heard it all by this point.

Vicky seemed a little more wobbly at the constant taunts, but with the rest of the team at her back she soon learned to brush it off. "They're only doing this because they know we're better than them," Alicia told her one evening in the common room, when the team was gathered for a strategy meeting while a gale-force wind blew outside. "They can't beat us on skill, so they're trying to fake us out in the hopes we get sloppy."

"It's a bit sad, really," Angelina sighed, shaking her head. "Seventh years having to resort to threatening a third year girl just to try and win."

Vicky giggled, a little of the confidence returning to her eyes. Harry grinned at her.

Draco and Cassius, despite being the two actually decent human beings on the Slytherin team, had of course joined their teammates in the harassment like the good little future Death Eaters they were supposed to be. Harry probably wasn't supposed to find their attempts quite as funny as he did, though.

Especially as Draco seemed to have forgotten one tiny little detail.

The morning of the match was utterly freezing, but otherwise the weather was practically perfect quidditch conditions; still winds, no rain, and not too much glaring sunlight. Harry and the rest of the team headed down to the pitch after breakfast, in high spirits — it was going to be a good game, Harry could feel it.

Inside the changing rooms, they donned their robes and checked their broomsticks over, listening to the sounds of the steadily growing crowd in the stands outside. Harry glanced over at Vicky, who was getting a quiet pep talk from Angelina.

"How d'you think she'll do?" he asked Katie under his breath.

"I reckon she'll handle it," she replied, grinning. "It's hard, having our toughest match first, but she's done really well in training. She'll be fine." Then her grin faltered for the briefest