

“You’ll get it,” Harry assured confidently, feeling incredibly strange being in jeans and a t-shirt while the rest of the team wore their quidditch gear. “You’re all great at dodging bludgers. You’ll be fine.”

They would certainly need to be great, because Kirke and Sloper were more likely to hit themselves with their bats than a bludger. Harry couldn’t believe there was so little talent in the younger years of Gryffindor; it did not bode well for next year’s cup.

Harry went with Neville to get a good seat in the stands, his stomach still squirming anxiously. “I hate this,” he muttered, and Neville clapped his shoulder.

“You’ll be back out there next year,” he said with confidence. Harry hoped he was right.

The match began, Lee Jordan’s commentary not quite as lively as usual, and while the female members of the Gryffindor quidditch team were performing as excellently as always, it was clear the two boys were not up to scratch. At one point, Kirke was so afraid of the bludger coming towards him he screamed and fell off his broom.

Harry’s hands were clenched in his lap, his eyes intently on the play. He’d already spotted the snitch thrice, and was desperately trying to will Ginny to notice it. But the Ravenclaw beaters were gunning for her, trying to give Cho the best chance, and with useless beaters Ginny could do little but dodge and hope for the best.

At one point, Harry noticed Hagrid further down in the stands — he was as bruised and bloodied as he had been all term, and was talking to Ron and Hermione. After a brief conversation, the trio left the stands. Harry was almost curious enough to go after them; he’d tried to talk to Hagrid about whatever it was that was causing all those injuries, especially after relaying a few cryptic warnings from Firenze, but Hagrid just kept gruffly insisting that Harry had enough on his plate.

With any luck, Ron and Hermione would be able to help the half-giant out with whatever he was doing.

Shaking it off, Harry turned back to the match, gaze flicking to the scoreboard at the commentator’s box. Gryffindor was down sixty-thirty, their chasers hardly able to keep possession of the quaffle because of their useless beaters.

“Come on, Ginny,” he urged, watching the redhead fly.

Another twenty minutes passed, the score becoming ninety-forty, when at last Ginny turned into a sharp dive, a bludger hot on her tail. Harry followed her line of sight, eye catching on the glint of gold, and he leaned forward in his seat. The bludger chasing her was actually doing her a favour; because of it, Cho couldn’t get close, circling her dive awkwardly.

“Yes, yes, go!” Neville muttered at Harry’s side, practically on his feet.

Ginny’s hand clenched around the tiny golden ball, and the Gryffindor stands *exploded* with noise.