Quidditch

As they entered November, the weather turned very cold. The

mountains around the school became icy grey and the lake like

chilled steel. Every morning the ground was covered in frost.

Hagrid could be seen from the upstairs windows, defrosting

broomsticks on the Quidditch pitch, bundled up in a long moleskin

overcoat, rabbit-fur gloves and enormous beaverskin boots.

The Quidditch season had begun. On Saturday, Harry would be

playing in his first match after weeks of training: Gryffindor

versus Slytherin. If Gryffindor won, they would move up into second

place in the House Championship.

Hardly anyone had seen Harry play because Wood had decided

that, as their secret weapon, Harry should be kept, well, secret. But

the news that he was playing Seeker had leaked out somehow, and

Harry didn’t know which was worse – people telling him he’d be

brilliant or people telling him they’d be running around underneath him,

holding a mattress. It was really lucky that Harry now had Hermione

as a friend. He didn’t know how he’d have got through all his homework

without her, what with all the last-minute Quidditch practice

Wood was making them do. She had also lent him Quidditch

through the Ages, which turned out to be a very interesting read.

Harry learnt that there were seven hundred ways of committing

a Quidditch foul and that all of them had happened during a

World Cup match in 1473; that Seekers were usually the smallest

and fastest players and that most serious Quidditch accidents

seemed to happen to them; that although people rarely died playing

Quidditch, referees had been known to vanish and turn up

months later in the Sahara Desert.

Hermione had become a bit more relaxed about breaking rules

since Harry and Ron had saved her from the mountain troll and

she was much nicer for it. The day before Harry’s first Quidditch

match the three of them were out in the freezing courtyard during

break, and she had conjured them up a bright blue fire which

could be carried around in a jam jar. They were standing with

their backs to it, getting warm, when Snape crossed the yard.

Harry noticed at once that Snape was limping. Harry, Ron and

Hermione moved closer together to block the fire from view; they

were sure it wouldn’t be allowed. Unfortunately, something about

their guilty faces caught Snape’s eye. He limped over. He hadn’t

seen the fire, but he seemed to be looking for a reason to tell them

off anyway.

‘What’s that you’ve got there, Potter?’

It was Quidditch through the Ages. Harry showed him.

‘Library books are not to be taken outside the school,’ said

Snape. ‘Give it to me. Five points from Gryffindor.’

‘He’s just made that rule up,’ Harry muttered angrily as Snape

limped away. ‘Wonder what’s wrong with his leg?’

‘Dunno, but I hope it’s really hurting him,’ said Ron bitterly.

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The Gryffindor common room was very noisy that evening. Harry,

Ron and Hermione sat together next to a window. Hermione was

checking Harry and Ron’s Charms homework for them. She

would never let them copy (‘How will you learn?’), but by asking

her to read it through, they got the right answers anyway.

Harry felt restless. He wanted Quidditch through the Ages back,

to take his mind off his nerves about tomorrow. Why should he be

afraid of Snape? Getting up, he told Ron and Hermione he was

going to ask Snape if he could have it.

‘Rather you than me,’ they said together, but Harry had an idea

that Snape wouldn’t refuse if there were other teachers listening.

He made his way down to the staff room and knocked. There

was no answer. He knocked again. Nothing.

Perhaps Snape had left the book in there? It was worth a try. He

pushed the door ajar and peered inside – and a horrible scene met

his eyes.

Snape and Filch were inside, alone. Snape was holding his

robes above his knees. One of his legs was bloody and mangled.

Filch was handing Snape bandages.

‘Blasted thing,’ Snape was saying. ‘How are you supposed to

keep your eyes on all three heads at once?’

Harry tried to shut the door quietly, but –

‘POTTER!’

Snape’s face was twisted with fury as he dropped his robes

quickly to hide his leg. Harry gulped.

‘I just wondered if I could have my book back.’

‘GET OUT! OUT!’

Harry left, before Snape could take any more points from

Gryffindor. He sprinted back upstairs.

‘Did you get it?’ Ron asked as Harry joined them. ‘What’s the

matter?’

In a low whisper, Harry told them what he’d seen.

‘You know what this means?’ he finished breathlessly. ‘He tried

to get past that three-headed dog at Hallowe’en! That’s where he

was going when we saw him – he’s after whatever it’s guarding!

And I’d bet my broomstick he let that troll in, to create a diversion!’

Hermione’s eyes were wide.

‘No – he wouldn’t,’ she said. ‘I know he’s not very nice, but he

wouldn’t try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe.’

‘Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints or something,’

snapped Ron. ‘I’m with Harry. I wouldn’t put anything past

Snape. But what’s he after? What’s that dog guarding?’

Harry went to bed with his head buzzing with the same question.

Neville was snoring loudly, but Harry couldn’t sleep. He tried

to empty his mind – he needed to sleep, he had to, he had his first

Quidditch match in a few hours – but the expression on Snape’s

face when Harry had seen his leg wasn’t easy to forget.

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The next morning dawned very bright and cold. The Great Hall

was full of the delicious smell of fried sausages and the cheerful

chatter of everyone looking forward to a good Quidditch match.

‘You’ve got to eat some breakfast.’

‘I don’t want anything.’

‘Just a bit of toast,’ wheedled Hermione.

‘I’m not hungry.’

Harry felt terrible. In an hour’s time he’d be walking on to the

pitch.

‘Harry, you need your strength,’ said Seamus Finnigan. ‘Seekers

are always the ones who get nobbled by the other team.’

‘Thanks, Seamus,’ said Harry, watching Seamus pile ketchup on

his sausages.

By eleven o’clock the whole school seemed to be out in the stands

around the Quidditch pitch. Many students had binoculars. The

seats might be raised high in the air but it was still difficult to see

what was going on sometimes.

Ron and Hermione joined Neville, Seamus and Dean the West

Ham fan up in the top row. As a surprise for Harry, they had

painted a large banner on one of the sheets Scabbers had ruined.

It said Potter for President and Dean, who was good at drawing,

had done a large Gryffindor lion underneath. Then Hermione

had performed a tricky little charm so that the paint flashed

different colours.

Meanwhile, in the changing rooms, Harry and the rest of the

team were changing into their scarlet Quidditch robes (Slytherin

would be playing in green).

Wood cleared his throat for silence.

‘OK, men,’ he said.

‘And women,’ said Chaser Angelina Johnson.

‘And women,’ Wood agreed. ‘This is it.’

‘The big one,’ said Fred Weasley.

‘The one we’ve all been waiting for,’ said George.

‘We know Oliver’s speech by heart,’ Fred told Harry. ‘We were

in the team last year.’

‘Shut up, you two,’ said Wood. ‘This is the best team

Gryffindor’s had in years. We’re going to win. I know it.’

He glared at them all as if to say, ‘Or else.’

‘Right. It’s time. Good luck, all of you.’

Harry followed Fred and George out of the changing room and,

hoping his knees weren’t going to give way, walked on to the pitch

to loud cheers.

Madam Hooch was refereeing. She stood in the middle of the

pitch, waiting for the two teams, her broom in her hand.

‘Now, I want a nice fair game, all of you,’ she said, once they

were all gathered around her. Harry noticed that she seemed to be

speaking particularly to the Slytherin captain, Marcus Flint, a

fifth-year. Harry thought Flint looked as if he had some troll

blood in him. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the fluttering

banner high above, flashing Potter for President over the crowd.

His heart skipped. He felt braver.

‘Mount your brooms, please.’

Harry clambered on to his Nimbus Two Thousand.

Madam Hooch gave a loud blast on her silver whistle.

Fifteen brooms rose up, high, high into the air. They were off.

‘And the Quaffle is taken immediately by Angelina Johnson of

Gryffindor – what an excellent Chaser that girl is, and rather

attractive, too – ’

‘JORDAN!’

‘Sorry, Professor.’

The Weasley twins’ friend, Lee Jordan, was doing the commentary for the match, closely watched by Professor McGonagall.

‘And she’s really belting along up there, a neat pass to Alicia

Spinnet, a good find of Oliver Wood’s, last year only a reserve –

back to Johnson and – no, Slytherin have taken the Quaffle,

Slytherin captain Marcus Flint gains the Quaffle and off he goes –

Flint flying like an eagle up there – he’s going to sc– no, stopped

by an excellent move by Gryffindor Keeper Wood and Gryffindor

take the Quaffle – that’s Chaser Katie Bell of Gryffindor there, nice

dive around Flint, off up the field and – OUCH – that must have

hurt, hit in the back of the head by a Bludger – Quaffle taken by

Slytherin – that’s Adrian Pucey speeding off towards the goalposts,

but he’s blocked by a second Bludger – sent his way by Fred or

George Weasley, can’t tell which – nice play by the Gryffindor

Beater, anyway, and Johnson back in possession of the Quaffle, a

clear field ahead and off she goes – she’s really flying – dodges a

speeding Bludger – the goalposts are ahead – come on, now,

Angelina – Keeper Bletchley dives – misses – GRYFFINDOR

SCORE!’

Gryffindor cheers filled the cold air, with howls and moans

from the Slytherins.

‘Budge up there, move along.’

‘Hagrid!’

Ron and Hermione squeezed together to give Hagrid enough

space to join them.

‘Bin watchin’ from me hut,’ said Hagrid, patting a large pair of

binoculars round his neck, ‘But it isn’t the same as bein’ in the

crowd. No sign of the Snitch yet, eh?’

‘Nope,’ said Ron. ‘Harry hasn’t had much to do yet.’

‘Kept outta trouble, though, that’s somethin’,’ said Hagrid,

raising his binoculars and peering skywards at the speck that was

Harry.

Way up above them, Harry was gliding over the game, squinting

about for some sign of the Snitch. This was part of his and Wood’s

game plan.

‘Keep out of the way until you catch sight of the Snitch,’ Wood

had said. ‘We don’t want you attacked before you have to be.’

When Angelina had scored, Harry had done a couple of loopthe-loops to let out his feelings. Now he was back to staring

around for the Snitch. Once he caught sight of a flash of gold but

it was just a reflection from one of the Weasleys’ wristwatches,

and once a Bludger decided to come pelting his way, more like a

cannon ball than anything, but Harry dodged it and Fred Weasley

came chasing after it.

‘All right there, Harry?’ he had time to yell, as he beat the

Bludger furiously towards Marcus Flint.

‘Slytherin in possession,’ Lee Jordan was saying. ‘Chaser Pucey

ducks two Bludgers, two Weasleys and Chaser Bell and speeds

towards the – wait a moment – was that the Snitch?’

A murmur ran through the crowd as Adrian Pucey dropped the

Quaffle, too busy looking over his shoulder at the flash of gold

that had passed his left ear.

Harry saw it. In a great rush of excitement he dived downwards

after the streak of gold. Slytherin Seeker Terence Higgs had seen it,

too. Neck and neck they hurtled towards the Snitch – all the

Chasers seemed to have forgotten what they were supposed to be

doing as they hung in mid-air to watch.

Harry was faster than Higgs – he could see the little round ball,

wings fluttering, darting up ahead – he put on an extra spurt of speed –

WHAM! A roar of rage echoed from the Gryffindors below –

Marcus Flint had blocked Harry on purpose and Harry’s broom

span off course, Harry holding on for dear life.

‘Foul!’ screamed the Gryffindors.

Madam Hooch spoke angrily to Flint and then ordered a free

shot at the goalposts for Gryffindor. But in all the confusion, of

course, the Golden Snitch had disappeared from sight again.

Down in the stands, Dean Thomas was yelling, ‘Send him off,

ref! Red card!’

‘This isn’t football, Dean,’ Ron reminded him. ‘You can’t send

people off in Quidditch – and what’s a red card?’

But Hagrid was on Dean’s side.

‘They oughta change the rules, Flint coulda knocked Harry

outta the air.’

Lee Jordan was finding it difficult not to take sides.

‘So – after that obvious and disgusting bit of cheating – ’

‘Jordan!’ growled Professor McGonagall.

‘I mean, after that open and revolting foul – ’

‘Jordan, I’m warning you – ’

‘All right, all right. Flint nearly kills the Gryffindor Seeker,

which could happen to anyone, I’m sure, so a penalty to

Gryffindor, taken by Spinnet, who puts it away, no trouble, and

we continue play, Gryffindor still in possession.’

It was as Harry dodged another Bludger which went spinning

dangerously past his head that it happened. His broom gave a

sudden, frightening lurch. For a split second, he thought he was

going to fall. He gripped the broom tightly with both his hands

and knees. He’d never felt anything like that.

It happened again. It was as though the broom was trying to

buck him off. But Nimbus Two Thousands did not suddenly

decide to buck their riders off. Harry tried to turn back towards

the Gryffindor goalposts; he had half a mind to ask Wood to call

time out – and then he realised that his broom was completely out

of his control. He couldn’t turn it. He couldn’t direct it at all. It

was zig-zagging through the air and every now and then making

violent swishing movements which almost unseated him.

Lee was still commentating.

‘Slytherin in possession – Flint with the Quaffle – passes Spinnet

– passes Bell – hit hard in the face by a Bludger, hope it broke his

nose – only joking, Professor – Slytherin score – oh no ...’

The Slytherins were cheering. No one seemed to have noticed

that Harry’s broom was behaving strangely. It was carrying him

slowly higher, away from the game, jerking and twitching as it

went.

‘Dunno what Harry thinks he’s doing,’ Hagrid mumbled. He

stared through his binoculars. ‘If I didn’ know better, I’d say he’d

lost control of his broom ... but he can’t have ...’

Suddenly, people were pointing up at Harry all over the stands.

His broom had started to roll over and over, with him only just

managing to hold on. Then the whole crowd gasped. Harry’s

broom had given a wild jerk and Harry swung off it. He was now

dangling from it, holding on with only one hand.

‘Did something happen to it when Flint blocked him?’ Seamus

whispered.

‘Can’t have,’ Hagrid said, his voice shaking. ‘Can’t nothing

interfere with a broomstick except powerful Dark Magic – no kid

could do that to a Nimbus Two Thousand.’

At these words, Hermione seized Hagrid’s binoculars, but

instead of looking up at Harry, she started looking frantically at

the crowd.

‘What are you doing?’ moaned Ron, grey-faced.

‘I knew it,’ Hermione gasped. ‘Snape – look.’

Ron grabbed the binoculars. Snape was in the middle of the

stands opposite them. He had his eyes fixed on Harry and was

muttering non-stop under his breath.

‘He’s doing something – jinxing the broom,’ said Hermione.

‘What should we do?’

‘Leave it to me.’

Before Ron could say another word, Hermione had disappeared.

Ron turned the binoculars back on Harry. His broom was

vibrating so hard, it was almost impossible for him to hang on

much longer. The whole crowd were on their feet, watching, terrified,

as the Weasleys flew up to try and pull Harry safely on to one

of their brooms, but it was no good – every time they got near

him, the broom would jump higher still. They dropped lower and

circled beneath him, obviously hoping to catch him if he fell.

Marcus Flint seized the Quaffle and scored five times without

anyone noticing. ‘Come on, Hermione,’ Ron muttered desperately.

Hermione had fought her way across to the stand where Snape

stood and was now racing along the row behind him; she didn’t

even stop to say sorry as she knocked Professor Quirrell headfirst

into the row in front. Reaching Snape, she crouched down, pulled

out her wand and whispered a few, well chosen words. Bright blue

flames shot from her wand on to the hem of Snape’s robes.

It took perhaps thirty seconds for Snape to realise that he was

on fire. A sudden yelp told her she had done her job. Scooping

the fire off him into a little jar in her pocket she scrambled back

along the row – Snape would never know what had happened.

It was enough. Up in the air, Harry was suddenly able to clamber

back on to his broom. ‘Neville, you can look!’ Ron said. Neville

had been sobbing into Hagrid’s jacket for the last five minutes.

Harry was speeding towards the ground when the crowd saw

him clap his hand to his mouth as though he was about to be sick

– he hit the pitch on all fours – coughed – and something gold fell

into his hand.

‘I’ve got the Snitch!’ he shouted, waving it above his head, and

the game ended in complete confusion.

‘He didn’t catch it, he nearly swallowed it,’ Flint was still howling twenty minutes later, but it made no difference – Harry hadn’t

broken any rules and Lee Jordan was still happily shouting the

result – Gryffindor had won by one hundred and seventy points

to sixty. Harry heard none of this, though. He was being made a

cup of strong tea back in Hagrid’s hut, with Ron and Hermione.

‘It was Snape,’ Ron was explaining. ‘Hermione and I saw him.

He was cursing your broomstick, muttering, he wouldn’t take his

eyes off you.’

‘Rubbish,’ said Hagrid, who hadn’t heard a word of what had

gone on next to him in the stands. ‘Why would Snape do somethin’ like that?’

Harry, Ron and Hermione looked at each other, wondering

what to tell him. Harry decided on the truth.

‘I found out something about him,’ he told Hagrid. ‘He tried to

get past that three-headed dog at Hallowe’en. It bit him. We think

he was trying to steal whatever it’s guarding.’

Hagrid dropped the teapot.

‘How do you know about Fluffy?’ he said.

‘Fluffy?’

‘Yeah – he’s mine – bought him off a Greek chappie I met in the

pub las’ year – I lent him to Dumbledore to guard the –’

‘Yes?’ said Harry eagerly.

‘Now, don’t ask me any more,’ said Hagrid gruffly. ‘That’s top

secret, that is.’

‘But Snape’s trying to steal it.’

‘Rubbish,’ said Hagrid again. ‘Snape’s a Hogwarts teacher, he’d

do nothin’ of the sort.’

‘So why did he just try and kill Harry?’ cried Hermione.

The afternoon’s events certainly seemed to have changed her

mind about Snape.

‘I know a jinx when I see one, Hagrid, I’ve read all about them!

You’ve got to keep eye contact, and Snape wasn’t blinking at all, I

saw him!’

‘I’m tellin’ yeh, yer wrong!’ said Hagrid hotly. ‘I don’ know why

Harry’s broom acted like that, but Snape wouldn’ try an’ kill a student! Now, listen to me, all three of yeh – yer meddlin’ in things

that don’ concern yeh. It’s dangerous. You forget that dog, an’ you

forget what it’s guardin’, that’s between Professor Dumbledore an’

Nicolas Flamel –’

‘Aha!’ said Harry. ‘So there’s someone called Nicolas Flamel

involved, is there?’

Hagrid looked furious with himself.