

Amicus Draconis - 1st Cycle: Cycle of the Badger

Translation of Amicus Draconis

Von Yamato_

Kapitel 3: 03. The Underwater Quidditch Game

Disclaimer: The characters don't belong to me, but to mighty JK Rowling (Yama bows deeply). I'm not making any money off this story, so please don't lock me up in Azkaban. Yama doesn't get along with Dementors. Also, none of the Book/Movie/TV show quotes Fred and George use are mine. They all belong to their respective authors. The opening song for episodes 1-13 is Sonnet No 92 by William Shakespeare, and the ending song for episodes 1-11 is Iron Fist by Motörhead.

Author's Notes: Sorry, it took me a while to update but translating all the lyrics was murderous. I spent hours in our college library with rhyming dictionaries, thesauri, and Longman Language Activators keeping me company. I'm telling you, I'm so NOT looking forward to translating the musical episode. Luckily we still have some time left until that, so let's plunge right into the love troubles of Lisa Turpin, Ravenclaw.

However, I should advise you before you get all tangled up in the Lisa storyline to read through the first two scenes carefully. As you can probably guess, they will be a little more important for the story arc than painting rosettes and romance on broomsticks.

Marguerite, who also goes by the nickname of Marie, is my own character. Though, technically, after OotP she exists in canon in a way. Won't say no more, until we get to the three sisters episode *g*.

Thanks to my betas, Notsosaintly, Ellie and Arsinyk and thanks to everyone who wrote me a review. *hands out more cookies* And some extra chocolate frogs for my new beta, Mind_over_Matter.

*

"Last episode, Harry and Ron snuck into Hogwarts to free a group of Muggles. Of course, they couldn't have done so without the map we gave them."

"Which makes us the heroes of last episode...."

"Naturally. Still, Little Bro and Golden Boy got themselves caught by Snape, who turned out to be a surprisingly good guy, considering what an evil git he is. It seems he's no Death Eater after all, but a spy for the Order."

"Which didn't stop Harry from capslocking...."

"Elementary, my dear Weasley. Bad yelling with the Man of Noses. Bad things happening in the past."

"Bad secrets for our poor audience, still recovering from this weird trailer thing."

"Yes, there seems to be a whole lot of mystery. What about the Slytherins? What about Harry messing with things that are too big for him? And finally, is our poor Trio stumbling headfirst into a tangled-up love triangle?"

*"We won't tell...." *smirks**

*

*But do thy worst to steal thyself away,
For term of life thou art assured mine;
And life no longer than thy love will stay,
For it depends upon that love of thine.*

*Then need I not to fear the worst of wrongs,
When in the least of them my life hath end.
I see a better state to me belongs
Than that which on thy humour doth depend:*

*Thou canst not vex me with inconstant mind,
Since that my life on thy revolt doth lie.
O what a happy title do I find,
Happy to have thy love, happy to die!*

*But what's so blessed-fair that fears no blot?
Thou mayst be false, and yet I know it not.*

*

*

Amicus Draconis

*

First Cycle: Cycle of the Badger

Episode 3: The Underwater Quidditch Game - Part A

*

"What do you mean by 'nothing came up yet'? Are you trying to imply that your master's concerns are no longer yours?"

There was only a slight trace of annoyance tingeing the sound of the voice, but it was enough to make the Seer's hands tremble and to bring tiny droplets of sweat to her forehead. "I've tried everything, my Lord, all the powers and resources at my disposal. The Crystal Ball, the Cards, not even the Lights revealed the secret to me. The hiding place of He Who Must Not Be Named seems to be protected by an ancient and powerful magic, which my humble skills are not able to penetrate. I cannot find the smallest hint of information on his whereabouts."

"So it is not lack of effort that prevents you from achieving your task. Incompetence, perhaps?" The annoyance had changed to something else now, mocking contempt and possibly a slight complacency at her moistening eyes and quivering lower lip. "Rumour gives the women of your family a reputation as powerful Seers, but one never should place too much faith in rumours, don't you think, my dear Marguerite?"

"Forgive me, my Lord." She had begun to cry in earnest now, lowering her eyelashes, as if her master stood before her personally. "I'll try harder. I'll do anything, I swear! On my life, which belongs to..."

"Quiet, girl." It was hard to determine whether the soft sound of these words was soothing or dangerous. "I don't have time for your silly whimpering. Go back to work."

"As you wish, Master. It's just my father will visit us today, and he should not know.... "

"You will not be disturbed in your work. I made sure of that. Your father will inform your husband shortly that he has postponed his visit until tomorrow because of his work in Azkaban. In fact, our friend Dumbledore could be telling him right now where he hid the one we are so desperately trying to find."

The voice chuckled softly, fading away into the stillness of her room. Just like last time. And the ones before.

She was alone again, but she knew the time would come when her Lord would no longer be content with excuses. She needed results. Results she could not give. Not with the methods she was using now.

But what else was there to use?

Should she turn to Father for help? No, that wouldn't do her any good. Men knew nothing about Seeing anyway. He only would frown upon her and chide her for not fulfilling her duties to Master and Family. And if he kept his temper, there would a long sermon. 'Obedience is a woman's first virtue, ma poupette.' She did not have time for that now. And she didn't deserve it, either.

After all she had not been the one to betray the family.

* * *

"Ay, if yeh ask me, Dumbledore's right." The dishes chinked softly on the huge wooden table as Hagrid set down an enormous mug of steaming tea. "Yeh shouldn't be roaming about, gettin' yerselves into trouble. Should stay put like Dumbledore would want yer to!"

"Snape said that, not Dumbledore," Hermione corrected him. "And to be honest, we don't know if we can trust Snape. Even Harry and Ron can't agree about it, which is so strange. They usually agree about not trusting Snape."

"I've told yeh a hundred times that Snape...." Hagrid began, but broke off with a sigh. "Where's Harry anyway? Still waitin' fer letters?" He stomped to the window of his forest hut and flung it open. "Come in, Harry! Tea's ready!"

"Shh, not so loud." Alarmed, she put a finger to her mouth and continued softly, "Besides, you're in more danger than us, Hagrid. Voldemort's people surely know that you're our friend. It was never a secret after all."

"I told yeh, they were there, the bunch o' them. Right after yeh had left Hogwarts. Treated me with some Veritaserum an' asked a lotta questions about yer hideout. Couldn't answer any of them, so they had ter let me go fer now. Have ter get clearance from the giants ter take me into custody, but they don't help without return service. Guess, I wasn't worth the trouble. And now - livin' in the forest, they can't find me no more. Tough luck on them."

Again, he leaned out of the window frame. "Harry, tea's getting cold!" He obviously wasn't comfortable with Harry being outside for so long, although the forest was supposed to be safe.

"All they need is some sort of treaty with the Centaurs and perhaps with some of the other Magical Creatures and Peoples living in here," Hermione considered, gazing thoughtfully into her own mug. "I don't think they'd need them all on their side, only the most powerful ones. Then they could just overrun the others and take control of the Forbidden Forest as well."

"Tha's right, m' lass," Hagrid smirked, "but the Centaurs'll never support old Tom. And it would be rather foolish o' him ter attack a neutral people and bring 'em t' our side. Harry, get in here, already!"

He waved his arm, still holding Harry's tea mug, spilling some of the hot liquid on the floor. Almost at once, Fang came running, wagging his tail and lapping up the tea from the floor while Crookshanks watched with a look of disgust on his grouchy face. If he were human, he might have made a comment about doggish ingestion, but as things were, he had to content himself with a genteel meowing.

"I'm here." Creaking, the heavy door was pushed open, and a windswept Harry slid through the gap, the Invisibility Cloak over his arm. "No owl," he said dejectedly, turning to Hermione.

"I've noticed," she said coldly and her expression hardened. "Looks like someone's been too busy for little love-letters."

Harry ignored her snappy comment, turning to Hagrid instead. "Thanks for the tea, but we really have to be off. We shouldn't let the others find out again that we've left the hideout."

Hastily, he took a sip, leaning forward to put the half empty mug back on the table. As he did so, a necklace slid from his collar, a black ring on a silver chain. The ring was shaped into a dog-like head with dark rubies as its eyes.

"Do you have to wear that thing all the time?" Hermione hissed with a careful glance to Hagrid, who was in the back of the cabin, throwing more wood into the fire. "What if the others see it?"

"Stop worrying, Hermione. It's just a piece of jewellery. No one would notice." Harry tucked the ring safely under his shirt and went to say goodbye to Hagrid. Hermione scarcely had enough time to pet her cat before Harry was back, spreading the Cloak over them both. Crookshanks meowed again, this time quite piteous, as he watched her disappear.

"Next time, take Ron with yeh," Hagrid called after them, as they squeezed through the door. "There's enough room fer three under tha'."

* * *

Returning to the hideout, Harry and Hermione found everyone in the Elders' Council alert and excited. At first they suspected the worst, but they quickly realised that the others were once again dwelling on a heated discussion about their favourite subject: Magical Shapes. Ron hastily informed them that they had almost agreed on a new Shape for Hallowe'en when someone came forward with the suggestion of creating a Quidditch field. Ron did not tell them who this certain someone was, but Hermione suspected him at once, and as usual, she was right.

"We do know that a Quidditch field is not provided in the original Shapes." Absorbed in thought, Hannah Abbott toyed with one of her plaids. "All Shapes contain buildings

suitable for living, rooms to sleep and spend time in, and usually some sort of garden or landscape around them. It's only logical; the Shapes are meant for long-time usage after all. Where are we supposed to sleep on a Quidditch field?"

"We'll probably need to improvise a bit," Dean Thomas suggested. "But first – what news of the outside world, Harry? Did Hagrid find out something new for us?"

Everyone fell silent; this was the first time someone had directly confronted Harry with his not-so-secret visits. All eyes were on him to see how he would react.

He simply shook his head. "There's been no news, which means no new rescue missions to go on."

Disappointed faces surrounded him; most students would have fancied a new and exciting adventure. "Oh well, mate...." Ron sighed before his expression suddenly brightened up. "So, let's talk Quidditch, then."

Harry looked at him curiously; it seemed that his best friend had cooked up some sort of plan or was brooding over an idea. "The solution is quite simple." Ron grinned. "You said it yourself, Harry. We will play Quidditch again, even if it has to be underwater."

The young witches and wizards threw each other looks, puzzlement and confusion in their eyes. Had Ron really said, 'Quidditch underwater? How on earth was that supposed to work?

"This whole Quidditch thing's another one of your silly jokes, isn't it, Ron?" For Padma Patil, the matter seemed closed.

"No, it's not ... this is good." Seamus Finnigan was just beginning to consider the possibilities. "There'd be enough room in the lake, and we couldn't be seen or heard from the outside...."

"We'd need lots and lots of Gillyweed, though," Mandy Brocklehurst added, "but we should get more of it anyway. It's not a bad thing to build up our supplies."

"But how will the balls work under water? Well, I guess we could use magic to get them to move differently, but..."

"And what's the deal with that, Lisa? This isn't the World Cup, It's just for fun!"

"Well, if you say so," Lisa Turpin snapped back at Mandy. The two Ravenclaw girls exchanged an angry glare, but didn't pursue the matter. For the rest of the discussion they chose to ignore each other.

"You are barking mad, all of you." Hannah shook her head disbelievingly. "Ernie, say something!" She nudged her boyfriend for support.

"I'm sorry to say this, my dear, but..." Ernie eyed her carefully, moving out of her reach, as she frowned at him. "I don't think it's such a bad idea after all. We have to provide

some sort of entertainment for the younger students, don't we? After all, being stuck in here is even harder on them than it is on us. We are responsible for their well-being."

"Well, perhaps...." Hannah seemed to be won over by this argument.

"Do you think the Merpeople will agree?" Neville Longbottom asked cautiously.

"We'll have to ask Chieftain Murcus for permission first," Hermione stated. "The day after tomorrow is Wednesday, the day of our weekly audience with her. She'll probably think it's a pretty strange idea, but we might be able to convince her. We wouldn't be doing anything to endanger the Tritons after all."

"Considering that our presence here endangers them anyway," Harry added softly. "We know what would happen to them if Voldemort's followers found us here."

A shudder ran through the crowd, and everyone fell silent for a moment.

Harry rose. "All right, let's take the vote. All in favour of the match raise your hands."

With only a few exceptions, the hands went up in the air. Hermione noticed a small grin spreading on Ron's face.

"It's settled, then."

* * *

For the next few days, the entire hideout was buzzing with excitement. Although the prefects hadn't had a chance to talk to Chieftain Murcus yet, most students seemed to be certain that the match would take place.

Never before had anyone seen so many brooms buzzing about in the air, and never before did Padma and Parvati Patil have to deal with so many broom crashes at once. The small airspace above the little Japanese houses proved entirely unsuitable for Quidditch training. Since the illusion of blue sky was so perfect, the ambitious New Hogwarts students kept smashing headfirst into the walls and the ceiling.

Down on the ground, things weren't exactly quiet either. Each of the three Houses was in a constant debate about the team line-up, and that didn't always run smoothly. With the Hufflepuffs, Justin Finch-Fletchley made quite a fuss because he wanted to be on the team, but wasn't a very good flyer. With the Gryffindors, the trouble was once again with the Creevy brothers.

Anyway, the Lions forgot all about their quarrels when Harry announced he would not take the Seeker position on the team. His Housemates, outraged at first, soon admitted grudgingly that he was doing the right thing. Harry's flying skills were easily good enough to enter a professional team; it wouldn't be fair to use them against the

other students. So fifteen-year-old Natalie McDonald took the position of Seeker, and Harry was named referee by an absolute majority of all years and Houses.

The students who did not have the ambition to enter their House team wanted to contribute to the match as well. Under Hermione's patronage they had converted the Orange Blossom Room into a workshop for painting and handicrafts. She herself was experimenting with certain charms to make all the flags, banners, and rosettes the others were creating fit for underwater usage.

"If you want to colour the lion, use the gold first, and then the red for background," Dean explained to little Ophelia Flowerfield, showing her a sketch on a huge transparent. Since Dean was very gifted with drawing, he was one of the sketchers, passing his works on for colouring.

"I'm not stupid. I know what the Gryffindor Lion looks like," Ophelia replied indignantly, pointing to her robes. She and most of the other rescued children had decided on a House by now. Thomas Krueger, who had come to regard Ophelia as a big sister, had decided on Gryffindor as well; it seemed that most of them had chosen the House of their respective saviour. Since it was going to be their first time ever to watch Quidditch, the children were especially excited about the game.

Across the room, Lisa, who was very good at drawings as well, sat at another table, busy with a tiny eagle on a Ravenclaw rosette. Since she did not stop to talk or to play with the children, her work progressed considerably faster. The others didn't worry about her silence; most of them knew Lisa to be a very quiet person, keeping to herself most of the time. Also, she did not get along well with small children.

Only once did she look up from her drawing to secure a strand of hair, which had freed itself from her tight French chignon. Lisa's dark brown hair was very sleek, constantly sliding out of her hairdos. Nevertheless, she liked to put it up so it wouldn't annoy her, and cutting it short wasn't really an option. There was no way she would ever look as scrubby as Mandy – thanks, but no thanks!

Why did she think such mean things about Mandy all of the sudden? The other girl had never done anything to her. That wasn't a fair thing to do, was it?

But who would worry about fair when Mandy was making passes at Terry? She was interested in him, this much was for sure. And maybe he even liked her back. It had not escaped Lisa's attention that he had been talking about her a lot, lately. Mostly to Lisa herself; after all, they had been friends since their first year at Hogwarts, and he usually confided in her.

After they had both become Ravenclaw prefects, their friendship had become even closer. Nonetheless, it had never developed into something else, and it wasn't until after Terry had started pursuing that gormless Mandy girl that Lisa realized that was exactly what she had wished for.

And still wished for....

The door slid open without a sound, and Seamus Finnigan tiptoed into the room. Since Dean sat with his back to the door, he did not notice his boyfriend sneaking up on him. Grinning, Seamus put a finger to his lips to signal Lisa and the others to be quiet. Lisa rolled her eyes; it was so obvious he was up for some stupid and childish prank, and in the very next moment, he grabbed the cushion Dean was sitting on and pulled it away from him.

Everybody laughed when Dean fell over, suddenly finding himself down on the floor. He reacted at once, reaching for Seamus and grabbing him into a headlock. His boyfriend struggled to escape, and Ophelia hastily put the colours away so they wouldn't get knocked over.

Lisa stood up, striding out of the room. She really wasn't in the mood for couply goofiness right now. Of course she knew that Dean and Seamus were only joking around a little – displaying intimate signs of affection in public was not customary for Hogwarts students – and for her bad mood this was definitely enough. She wanted to get some fresh air.

The Fates were not on her side today. Right outside the room in the dark corridor, she ran into Ernie and Hannah. Now these two had really believed themselves unobserved, and so they stood very close, gazing lovingly into each other's eyes. Lisa rushed past them, not minding their startled looks. Finally, she was out in the open.

And that was when she hit bottom. On one of the wooden planks, right in the middle of the water-lilied pond, sat none other than Terry and Mandy, absorbed in blissful conversation. Apart from socializing, they were pushing tiny miniature brooms around in the air. Were they talking strategy for the Quidditch game?

The looks they gave each other said something else....

She turned without a word, hastening back into the building. Not to the workshop room, however. She was heading for the Ravenclaw girls' dormitories to finally find some solitude.

And should any love couple use that particular room for some secret snogging session, then God have mercy on them.

* * *

Wednesday afternoon had finally arrived and Lisa met with Terry, Hannah, Ernie, Hermione and Harry in front of the houses at the pond. The weekly meeting with Chieftain Murcus was the only occasion (apart from the Shape Changing, of course) when all six of the seventh-year Prefects left the hideout together. Since the Prefects had no wish to endanger themselves or the others, they would remain below the surface of the lake at all times.

The Tritons – that was the original name of the Merpeople – lived inside an

underwater city, consisting of the huge coral reef where Chieftain Murcus and her court dwelled, and many surrounding houses and gardens. Not even Neville or Hermione could have explained how this particular coral was able to survive in the icy lake water; their best guesses were that it somehow had to be a Magical Creature itself.

The reef was busy as a beehive, a continual coming and going through its many exits and entrances. Everybody seemed to want to be anywhere but where they were, but this was probably due to the Tritons' restless nature. They never remained stationary for long periods of time; even conversations were held while swimming. From one room into the next, inside, outside – it was all the same to them. For human visitors, who were used to quietly sitting and socializing in chairs, it was pretty hard to get used to.

The Tritons didn't even own such things; the concept of chairs was completely unknown to them. Why would anyone want to bend their middle and hover over a piece of wood anyway?

Anyway, as time passed, the young witches and wizards had become accustomed to many elements of the strange and exciting culture around them. The process was mutual, of course; the visitors would prove to be an intriguing and ever mysterious research object to the natives. The Tritons were especially fascinated and awed by magic in its every form. During their last visit, the six young witches and wizards had encountered a passing elementary school class, entertaining the Merchildren with multi-coloured sparks from their wands. Another time, they had tried to magically spice the Merfood, but that one had been a total disaster.

When the humans entered the audience hall riding their strange wooden sticks and flipping their fake Gillyweed fins, there was no sign of Chieftain Murcus. Maybe all the waiting had tired her out, and she had decided to engage herself otherwise. Or maybe there was work to be done, and she had forgotten all about the time. Time wasn't really an issue underwater, and for people like Lisa Turpin, who favoured punctuality over everything else, this attitude was particularly hard to grasp.

Inside the audience hall, a large group of Mermen and women was busy swimming around and across a large table, talking in merry musical voices and filling their stomachs with a delicious meal. Like on any audience day, the table was buckling under the weight of all the fish, sea fruit and water plants the Tritons had to offer. One thing the New Hogwarts students had noticed early on was how generous their hosts were when it came to food. They were the ones who provided their meals ever since the young witches and wizards had taken refuge down in the lake.

What was not customary among them was to wait for their guests to arrive and start the meal. They didn't seem to have fixed meal times anyway; they had something whenever they were hungry and then simply swam on. Most adults took care of their own food anyway; food on tables was something for celebrations and other special occasions, such as visits from strange tailless creatures with or without weird wooden sticks.

The Tritons waved at their visitors, eagerly pointing to the food on the table. They looked rather threatening with their wild green manes of hair, their glistening fish tails and those huge spears they waved about. And it would be foolish to underestimate them; they were a martial folk and could prove a great danger to a potential enemy.

Lisa had been cautious at first, not knowing how she should deal with these people, but very soon she had come to like the visits with them. She had even managed to learn a few of those musical tunes they used to communicate with each other. Only very few of them spoke English, and if they did, it was rather broken.

After the visitors had put the brooms away and tried some of the different foods, Hannah swam up to a stone shelf located near the ceiling. Since you could effortlessly move in all three dimensions by flipping your fins; the furniture did not have to be set on the floor like in human housings. Hannah took a couple of small blackboards with coral quills from the shelf and handed them out to the other teenagers. Those were used for communication, because English was barely understandable underwater and their knowledge of Mermish was still quite limited.

Harry was the only exception; he could even hold small conversations in Mermish. Either he had a natural linguistic talent, or the rumours were true that Dumbledore had made him learn the basics of several Magical Creatures' languages. Maybe both, but how could the boy have known that he would need those languages later on? To Lisa it all seemed pretty strange, but then, he was Harry Potter.

Right now he was talking to a young girl with very long teal blue hair. He even seemed to be flirting, because the girl blushed and giggled in a chime-like sound. She wondered about that for quite a while – Harry did not seem the type to make girls laugh. Of course she respected him greatly as a leader, but whenever she compared him to Terry, it seemed to her that Terry was a lot more fun to be around; he was cheerful, easy-going and liked to live on the bright side of life. Harry, on the other hand, seemed so removed from everyday teenage life, his head filled with countless thoughts and his soul hiding mysteries an ordinary person like her couldn't even begin to comprehend.

But maybe a person had to become like that if so much bad stuff had happened to them in early childhood. And if that hadn't been enough, he always had so much responsibility to deal with. That didn't leave much time for a normal life indeed.

Suddenly, she had to think of Cho and that thought flashed through her mind like a painful stab. Cho had been such a cheerful girl: pretty, vivacious, always the centre of attention. Then that thing with her boyfriend Cedric happened, and it broke her; it completely broke her. She had been expelled from Hogwarts, or had run away – no one knew for sure. None of the other Ravenclaws knew what had become of her either, not even her former friends like Lisa. Rumour had it, she had taken her own life, but Lisa refused to believe it.

Lisa hadn't understood much of Harry's conversation with the Triton girl, but she was certain that Chieftain Murcus' name had come up. The girl swam out through one of

the windows and returned a short while later with the chieftain of the tribe.

Murcus looked – if possible – even wilder than the rest of her people. Her green hair, striped with coral red strands, was kept out of her face by fishbones. Her green garment, clashing horribly with her hair, seemed to be made from seaweed. Torn and tattered, it floated around her torso, held by a chain of shark's teeth at her waist. Her breasts and belly-button were decorated with all sorts of brightly coloured fishbone piercings, as were her nose, lips, and eyebrows. In her hand, instead of the spear she usually carried, she held a leash with a Grindylow pulling at its end. She had probably been taking one of her pets for a walk when the blue-haired girl found her.

She hissed at the Grindylow, which was trying to jump onto the table, wrapping the leash several times around her hand to shorten it.

*"Oh, don't you dare, beware of my glare
This day's bad hair and my nerves lie bare.
So be a good hound, stay down on the ground,
And you'll like the sound of what I found."*

She threw him a large chunk of calamari, which he grabbed eagerly, bubbling and smacking his lips as he ate. Then she turned to her human guests. Lisa scraped her Mermish together to at least say an adequate hello: "We bring you greetings to our happy meetings."

*"I'm greeting you back; now cut me some slack
Before I crack from stress attack.
I want to smack and whack a pack
Of stupid pricks; they make me sick.
I took a quick pick of these tricks
To block one's mind to things unkind.
A humble peace is hard to find.
Oh, don't you dare mock, my human flock,
Now mind the clock and please unlock:
Why shock my block with your loud knock?"*

"Uhm...." The boys and girls exchanged rather helpless looks, while desperately racking their brains for the best way to express their request. The fact that Chieftain Murcus obviously wasn't in the best of moods certainly didn't help in achieving their goal. For the first time, Lisa had the uneasy feeling that it hadn't been such a great idea to get everyone so excited about the match before asking permission. Maybe they shouldn't have rushed things so much.

As could be expected, all glances turned to Harry. He gave a long bubbling sigh and went to it:

*"You saved us from a dreadful fate,
By giving us new homes.
We live in safety, unafraid
Beneath the water foams.*

*A tricky question we pursued
Till now to no avail:
How to express our gratitude
When words entirely fail.*

*We thought some more and found a way
To fill your hearts with glee.
A gift the kindness to repay,
A special one, you'll see.*

*It can be seen, it can be heard,
Be felt, but not be touched.
It brings excitement beyond words;
Hands will be grasped and clutched.*

*And arms will wave and voices yell
In merriment and cheer.
These times are dark, but they will fail
To break what we hold dear.*

*I see the mystery in your eyes;
No key yet to unlock it.
The answer to this riddle lies
Well hidden in my pocket.*

Harry stuck his hand inside the pockets of his robes, pulling something out. At first Lisa could not see what it was, but then she noticed the flick of gold glimmering between his fingers. Murcus seemed to have understood as well for a wide smile slowly spread over her excited face.

Slowly Harry opened his fist. In the palm of his hand sparkled a golden Snitch.

* * *

"Get out the Pearlchampagne, people," Terry shouted, while the prefects smiled knowingly at all the anxious faces awaiting them. "Yesss!" He pumped his arm and leapt from his broom, practically into arms of the person standing next to him, giving them smooches all over their cheek. This unexpected behaviour startled Justin Finch-Fletchley a little, but nonetheless he didn't waste any time to worry about it, joining the cheering instead.

Lisa had never seen the hideout in such a state; everybody was jumping up and down, squealing and waving their arms. If Terry had brought the message of the enemy's downfall, the mood couldn't have been more ecstatic.

"The Merpeople can't wait to see us play," Terry continued. "Chieftain Murcus is overjoyed. Harry was the one doing the negotiation; he sold it to them really well. Made it sound as if we're organising the match as a gift for the Merpeople. She said we don't have to repay them in any way, but Harry said it's not posing any trouble for us; it'll be fun. And he's right, too. Isn't he?" He winked at Harry, who gave him a reluctant grin.

"Wicked, mate!" Harry's best friend Ron Weasley made his way through the crowd, grabbing the Head Boy into a bear hug. "Where did you get this idea from? They can't refuse now, and we're even doing them a favour."

Harry grinned mischievously, patting Ron on the back. "I suppose my Slytherin side must have kicked in."

"Don't say things like that." Harry's other best friend, Hermione Granger, scowled at him. "You didn't take advantage of them, did you? You made everybody happy."

"Hermione, please, not now. OK?" Harry let go of Ron to face her. "You know what I meant; it's not about taking advantage of other people. It's more like taking advantage of circumstances. That's still Slytherin mentality."

"Harry, I'm not trying to argue with you," Hermione protested. "If you stopped arguing with me, we would be just fine. In fact, we'd be even more fine if you simply stopped mentioning the S-word in my presence. Are you trying to provoke me?"

"You two do realise that you're ruining the best moment of my life," Ron complained. "Stop arguing, both of you. There's a match to be organized. Three matches, actually."

He rummaged around in his pockets until he found what he was looking for. "The team line-up for the Lions is all set; we can go public now. What about you lot?"

"All finished." Susan Bones passed him another piece of parchment with the completed line-up for Hufflepuff.

"Eagles are ready to soar." Beaming, Terry handed Weasley the list for Ravenclaw.

How was this possible? How could their team line-up be finished already? Lisa couldn't remember a single discussion about it; at least none she had taken part in. Had the others made the decisions without her? She was a Prefect, for Merlin's sake!

Ron tipped his wand to his throat to magically enhance his voice with the Sonorus Charm and turned to his fellow rebels. "OK, people, word has it, there'll be a Quidditch tournament this Saturday!"

There was another round of loud cheers, and Ron seemed to rather enjoy the attention as he continued his speech. "Chieftain Murcus and the Tritons gave us permission today, so let's get right to it. Our tournament will consist of three games so that all our teams have a chance face each other. Winner is the team that scores the most wins, or in case of a draw, the most points. I'll read out the team line-ups, and then we'll figure out what else is there to organize. As you know, Hermione's responsible for decorations, and Ernie's in charge of finding the right spot for the field and putting up the loops. He could probably use some help. Right, Ernie?"

Lisa wasn't listening anymore; she was far too preoccupied with her own thoughts. How could Terry have treated her that way? He had simply ignored her. The others had made the team line-up without her, hadn't even asked her opinion. She was a Prefect, for Merlin's sake!

"Hey, Dennis, that's going to be a real catfight," a young Gryffindor sniggered. "All three Seekers are girls, did you see? Laura Madley for Hufflepuff, Mandy Brocklehurst for Ravenclaw, and we've got Natalie."

Mandy Brocklehurst? So that was the reason why he hadn't told her! Of course he had wanted to keep it a secret from her that his beloved Mandy would take the position of Seeker. He was bound to know that she wouldn't agree. So he made sure that all Quidditch talk happened in her absence. What a disgusting little plot!

Just a minute ago she had been so certain that she was dealing with a simple misunderstanding, but now it was crystal clear to her it was something else.

Lisa clenched her fists tightly. She would never ever let that little brat Mandy steal Terry away from her. Maybe Mandy had been the one behind the whole intrigue; yes that had to be it, but she would never fall for such a cheap scheme.

Mandy would regret this. She would make sure of it.

* * *

Amicus Draconis - 1st Cycle: Cycle of the Badger - Part 3: The Underwater Quidditch Game

"I wonder, I wonder, do you know what I wonder?"

"What?"

"Say what?"

"Five, six, seven, eight!"

*Ka boom boom jonk! Ka boom boom jonk!
Hekki hekki hekki hekki! Hekki hekki hekki hekki!*

*Bong badabong! Bong badabong!
Yoh yoh yoh yoh! Yoh yoh yoh yoh!*

*"There was a young Weasley named Fred
Who kept chocolate frogs in his bed.
One day they got pulped
And poor mother gulped,
Grasping her nose as she fled."*

*Ka boom boom jonk! Ka boom boom jonk!
Taterang bang bang! Taterang bang bang!
Kch ptping bing! Kch ptping bing!
Aweeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Aweeeeeeeeeeeeeee!*

*"There was a young Weasley named George
Who fake chocolate froggies did forge.
Tasting like dung,
They jumped on his tongue
Until they got stuck in his gorge."*

*Ka boom boom jonk! Ka boom boom jonk!
Yoh yoh yoh yoh! Yoh yoh yoh yoh!
Dsh dsh honk dsh dsh honk honk! Dsh dsh honk dsh dsh honk honk!
Bong badabong bang! Bong badabong bang!*

*"There once was a fic named AD.
T'was odd beyond any degree.
It mixed George and Fred,
And any who read
Right into its weird potpourri."*

Ka boom boom jonk! Ka boom boom jonk!

Klonk!

Pling!

"Hey, you prat, now you broke it!"

Amicus Draconis - 1. Zyklus: Zyklus des Dachses - Part 3: Quidditch unter Wasser

Gradually, the evening merged into night, and at some point or other, the students either became bored with working or left for bed. Around midnight, Lisa and Hermione were the only ones left in the Orange Blossom Room; Lisa was drawing, and Hermione was using different charms on the artworks to make them water resistant

or let their colours flash in different lights. Since Lisa had worked all day long, Ravenclaw now ranked highest in terms of the quantity of flags, banners, pennants, and rosettes they now possessed.

"Something bothering you, Lisa?" Hermione suddenly broke the silence, concern showing on her face as she tried to give the other girl an encouraging smile.

That question confused Lisa. "Why would you think something like that?" she replied a little defensively. "I'm fine."

Hermione was still smiling at her. "I always plunge into work like that when I don't feel well. It keeps me from brooding."

"There's too much to brood about right now," Lisa sighed, "but it wouldn't get us anywhere, so..."

They fell silent, refocusing their concentration onto their work again. For a long while, the rustle of paper and the scratch of quill remained the only sounds in the room. Neither one of the young women was particularly keen on discussing their current situation.

Lisa was surprised that Hermione had noticed anything was wrong. They got along well enough, preferring to spend their time with a good book instead of gossiping away about boys and make-up. Nevertheless, they hadn't become close friends; at least not close enough to share their secrets. So she hesitated at first. Should she tell Hermione about what happened with Terry?

No, better not. She didn't feel comfortable talking about such things anyway.

"Imagine," she began cautiously, despite herself, "imagine there's a boy you've known for a long time. A close friend, perhaps; maybe even your best one. You've known each other since childhood and you always felt comfortable around him, even when you two were fighting. And then, suddenly, everything changes. You develop feelings for him, strange feelings that haven't been there before ... What do you do?"

'How childish am I?' she wondered as she told Hermione this. 'I sound like a silly little school girl with her first crush.'

But then, this was her first crush. Or her first time in love. Or whatever....

"Talk to him, of course," Hermione replied without hesitation. "That way you can find out whether he fancies you, too, or whether the whole thing is pointless." A frown crossed her forehead as she continued. "Or, if you knew that the whole thing was pointless from the beginning, don't talk to him and drop the matter. Rejection is painful enough but losing a friend is a risk I wouldn't be willing to take."

With her last words she had lowered her wand, gazing absentmindedly at the Gryffindor rosette lying on the table. "No, you should talk to him," she concluded, defiantly raising her head to give Lisa a weak smile. "If you don't, you'll have to deal

with these repressed feelings all the time, and things will only end up getting more complicated."

"Thanks." Lisa closed the colour jars and started to clean her quills and brushes. "I think I'll go to bed now ... it's getting really late."

It was only when she was lying awake in her dormitory that she realized she had possibly been a little rude towards Hermione. The Head Girl had listened to her whining and had actually given her some honest advice, and she had simply rushed out on her...

It seemed that Hermione was rather familiar with the situation herself. But why? Did it have anything to do with Harry? He was Hermione's best friend after all; maybe she had finally developed some more-than-friendly feelings for him. After all, the endless rumours about them never seemed to die down. Maybe there was some grain of truth to them....

Not that this was any of her concern. Her sole concern was Mandy, the girl whom Terry admired for being such a skilled flier and Quidditch player.

Lisa smiled. It was not a good kind of smile. Would Terry still admire Mandy if she made a fool of herself at the Quidditch game?

"Hey, Harry, wait up!"

Harry Potter paused in his steps to let Terry catch up with him. "Ron just told me you and Hermione are going to fly out later to get some more Gillyweed for the game, is that right?" he asked the Head Boy all in one breath.

Harry nodded. "It's about time we did. The game's tomorrow after all."

"Mind if Mandy and I tag along?"

"Not at all. We planned on taking some more people anyway. The swamps aren't exactly the safest of places; it would be too risky if just the two of us went. What about Lisa? Is she coming too?"

"No, but you and Hermione can open the hideout, so we don't need her," Terry explained, hopelessly failing at trying to sound casual. "And Ernie and Hannah are staying here, so we've got two Prefects in the hideout. They finished putting up the loops, and they won't put up decorations 'til tomorrow morning so the stuff doesn't get soaked over night." He broke off as he realized he was babbling. Hopefully Harry hadn't noticed.

It appeared that he had, and now he looked slightly apprehensive. "It sounds like

you've got it all planned out. Terry, what's going on?"

Terry took a look around to make sure no one was listening before he turned back to the other boy. He needed Harry's support in this and he knew he would have to spill the beans to get it. "Listen, mate, all I want is a chance to talk to Mandy on her own. That's why I want to take her along and that's why I didn't tell Lisa. You see, in here it's really difficult. There's people everywhere and no privacy, and I don't want everyone to know that I'm going to ask her out. But once we're outside, digging for Gillyweed in the mud—not that that sounds very romantic—I'm sure, there's a chance that you and Hermione could choose a different spot to ... err ... dig in the mud."

"Well..." Harry was still frowning; he didn't seem entirely convinced. "OK, but you need to stay within sight. Like I said, the swamps are a dangerous place. They're the home of the Water Widows, and we don't know what else lurks down in the mud. The one we'll be digging in."

"Don't worry, we'll be careful," Terry promised. "I know it's Mandy's first time out there, but I've collected Gillyweed before. I know the dangers."

He gave Harry a wink. "Just because I'm a hormone driven teenage boy who's madly in love doesn't automatically mean I'm going to risk all our lives over a bit of romance."

"No, of course not," Harry said stiffly. His eyes narrowed for a moment, but when they focused on Terry again, they retained a perfectly neutral expression. "I suppose you'd better go get your broom, then."

The evenings were still sunny, but October had brought with it chilly winds and a wave of cold. The four teenagers flew in silence as they crossed the lake, enjoying the sun and the fresh air—a rare, precious taste of freedom. Usually when they got outside, they were either rescuing somebody or fleeing from somebody else.

They enjoyed the ride, but afraid of feeling overconfident, they kept a close eye on their surroundings. Moving in silence, they avoided loud noises or reckless flight manoeuvres to make sure they didn't draw unnecessary attention to themselves. The Forbidden Forest had eyes and ears and they were well aware of it.

Where the shallows of the lake seemed to lead directly into the woods, the swamps began; only the tree roots stretching out into the lake held the muddy ground together. Tiny rills were drawing like cobwebs through the moist earth, collecting the water in dirty pools. It was not safe to walk on foot here, because you never knew where the ground would still support your weight and where it would give way to the horrors beneath. Hungry creatures and poisonous plants were lurking, waiting for unsuspecting victims they could pull into the depths of the earth to devour them. To be safe, the students rarely left their brooms while cutting Gillyweed, and they made sure that someone always kept watch.

"Harry, over here!" Terry saw Hermione approach a small pond where tentacle-like branches protruded from the greenish surface of the water. With one last glance back, Harry followed her.

Terry gave him a roguish wink to show him that everything was all right and turned to Mandy. "We'll look over here, OK? You coming?"

"We'll have to be careful though. Didn't you see the cobwebs?" As she followed Terry, Mandy pulled a small bag out of the pockets of her robes. With the help of some lavender powder, it was possible to make the huge webs of the Water Widows more visible so you wouldn't accidentally brush against the sticky threads. As long as their webs weren't touched, the giant spiders would not attack; it was not in their nature.

When all the cobwebs around them glistened in pale purple, Terry pulled a knife from his pocket and started cutting off the slimy sprouts of the plant. "This would be so much easier with a Summoning Charm," he sighed.

Mandy shrugged her shoulders. "I suppose so, but we'd rip the roots out, too. We would've used it all up in a few short weeks, and since Gillyweed isn't even natural to this climate, it's not like we could get more of it anywhere else. So..."

Dispirited, she lowered her eyes. "And who knows how long we'll have to stay underwater...."

If Terry had looked at her, he'd probably have realized that this would have been a perfect moment for a comforting move, perhaps a smile or even an arm around the girl's shoulders. He was busy, however, peeking past her to make sure that Harry and Hermione were out of hearing range. "Uhm ... Mandy, listen, I..."

"What is it?" She steered her broom sideways to dodge a long black tentacle suddenly lashing out from between the greenish-grey weeds. Since the sun hadn't sunk yet, the Devil's Snare pulled back immediately; it could not bear sunlight. Mandy gave a breath of relief and turned back to Terry.

"Mandy ... uhm ... I ... I wanted to ask you something."

"Fire away." She smiled, trying to appear more confident than she actually was.

"I ... uhm ... don't object to you, you know?"

Mandy's cheeks flushed scarlet as she mumbled something too softly for Terry to make out. Terry's face reddened as well, and he dropped his glance, staring at the bundle of Gillyweed he was holding in his hands. 'Words,' Terry thought with some annoyance, 'have an irritating habit of vanishing right when you need them most; after all the cheeky comments that bubbled up at the most inopportune times, surely it wouldn't be too much to ask that they be present the one time I truly need them. But apparently, it is.'

"I like you, too, you know." Mandy's heroic attempt to rescue him from his speechlessness went unnoticed.

"I ... uhm" Terry mumbled.

"Watch out!" Terry hadn't paid attention and was hovering close to the spider's web, his arm almost touching one of the glistening threads. Unfortunately Mandy's shriek caused him to jump and accidentally brush against it. He struggled to get free again, but his arm was stuck.

"Hurry, the spider's coming!" Mandy leaned forward and reached for Terry, trying to pull him away by the speed of her broom. Only her broom didn't want to pick up speed. Instead it made a sudden, unexpected leap. She managed to grab hold of it, but didn't release Terry soon enough; he was pulled off his broom and fell headfirst into the Water Widow's web.

"Terry!" Mandy yelled. She wanted to reach for her wand, but her broom bucked violently like a horse in panic, and she had to cling to it with both of her hands. She had no clue what was wrong with the bloody thing: it wouldn't obey any commands; it skipped and bounced and spun as if it was trying to throw her off on purpose. For one moment, she wondered whether she should just jump off, but there were spiders' webs beneath her, and if she got caught in there as well, Harry and Hermione would have to rescue them both.

The mud smacked and gargled as the giant Water Widow worked her way out of it, her huge black mouth pincers clicking threateningly. Terry screamed and tried to wrestle his arms free from the sticky threads, but they were as tough as they were elastic.

Just like monstrous rubber bands....

From the corner of her eye, Mandy saw Harry and Hermione speeding through the air; luckily, both of them were keeping their cool. Their wands were already out, and they attacked the spider together, trying to keep her away from Terry

"Watch out," Terry shouted from below. "There's a Devil's... "

A giant black tentacle darted upwards from the mud, wrapping itself around Harry's arm. The fading daylight was no longer strong enough to keep the dangerous plant at bay.

Mandy did not see what happened next. Her broom shot straight down, and the only thing her eyes could make out was the dark ground lined with purplish threads. Coming closer and closer....

The world went flashy and sticky and black.

"Say, Padma, have you seen Hermione by any chance?" In the Orange Blossom Room, Lisa was sitting with a group of other girls, stowing away her quills and brushes. "I just wanted to let her know that I'm finished with tomorrow's decorations."

Padma shook her head. "No idea where she could be. Did you check the Gryffindor Common Room?"

Officially, there still was a Common Room for each House, but no one kept to their own any more; too many friendships and relationships had been formed between members of different Houses. Since they all had to trust each other in their current situation, they had done away with the passwords as well.

"All set for tomorrow?" The sliding door opened just far enough to let a red-haired head poke in. Ron took his duties as Quidditch organizer very seriously; he was constantly dashing around and checking in with everyone involved in the preparations. So far, he had successfully made sure that everything was running smoothly.

Lisa and Padma nodded at his question and Lisa added: "You haven't, by any chance, seen Hermione?"

"I couldn't have," Ron explained. "She's left for the Gillyweed swamps with Harry, Terry and Mandy. I would've gone along as well, if I didn't have so many important..."

"Mandy, too?" Lisa interrupted him, hand flying involuntarily to her mouth in horror. "Ron, please, where are Ernie and Hannah?"

Ron only shrugged, but a few girls giggled, among them Hannah's friend Susan. "You can't talk to them right now," she said blushing. "They ... uhm ... retired for a little while."

Lisa practically stormed from the room. Ernie and Hannah would either be in the seventh year boys' or girls' dormitory, so she raced down the corridor with the Hufflepuff dormitories. Reaching the girls' one first, she scraped at the door, almost ripping the paper. As she shouted Hannah's name, a muffled voice replied, and a few moments later the Hufflepuff girl appeared in the doorway, her blond hair tousled over the morning robes she had hastily thrown over. "What happened, Lisa?" she asked, concerned.

"I don't have time to explain right now," Lisa shouted desperately. "Please, you have to open the hideout at once. Mandy's out there collecting Gillyweed, and her broom's not working right ... Please, you have to hurry!"

"We'll be out in just a moment." Luckily, Hannah didn't waste any precious time with questions. She and Ernie threw on some clothes while Lisa Summoned their brooms, and only a few minutes later, all three of them flew upwards to the cloud holding the entrance of their hideout.

"You have to take someone with you," Ernie demanded. "We can't leave, you know that, but you shouldn't be out there alone...."

"Please, we don't have time!" Lisa urged. It would take precious minutes to fly back down and find someone of age, minutes which—for all she knew—Mandy did not have. It was a risk she just couldn't take.

"We'll send a couple of people after you," Hannah suggested, reaching for her golden key. "The Gillyweed swamps, right?"

Lisa nodded and spun her broom around, ready to race.

Damn, how could she have let this happen? If something happened to Mandy out there, it was her fault and her fault alone.

It was only when she realized she couldn't breathe that she realized she hadn't had any Gillyweed herself. In all this haste she had completely forgotten about it. For one brief second she considered a Bubble Head Charm, but she didn't know whether it would work underwater, and if she muttered an incantation she wouldn't have any breath left. If she tried and failed, she would drown for sure.

Instead, she made desperate attempts to race even faster, the force of the water pounding against her body, almost ripping her off her broom. Locking her fingers around the handle, she clung onto it; she needed to reach the surface before she fainted, or it would be all over. Damn, why couldn't this stupid thing go faster! Just a little bit!

Her lungs felt like fire; she started coughing and choking and grasping for air. Somehow the water around her seemed brighter; was she finally getting close to the surface, or was she losing consciousness? Why couldn't this stupid broom...

The world around her seemed to fade just as her broom finally broke through the surface of the lake, wonderful fresh air filling her lungs. Her hands, however, finally slipped off the handle and she was thrown back into the lake. Her empty broom rose in the air a bit before it fell back down in the water, luckily not too far away from her. Trying to stay on the surface, she realized how icy the water was and how heavily her wet clothes pulled her down. She would catch a cold for sure.

But this was all her fault....

Nevertheless, she managed to reach her broom, the wind pulling her wet clothes as she started racing through the air. Her body stiffened with all the cold, but she didn't even notice. 'Please, please, Mandy, be all right,' she prayed silently.

What if Mandy wasn't? What if something had happened to her?

What if she came too late?

The sounds of battle greeted her as she reached the swamps. From afar she could hear voices shouting incantations, the sizzling and rustling of spells and the thunder of an explosion.

Voices, yes.

But not Mandy's....

Below her, Terry hung inside the giant cobweb of a Water Widow. Hermione attacked the spider with Stunning Spells, which couldn't penetrate the creature's thick body armour, but kept her distracted, buying Harry enough time to cut Terry free. Some ripped plant parts lay on the ground below them; it looked as if there had been additional trouble with a Devil's Snare.

Anyhow, they would be OK. Terry was almost free from the sticky threads.

But where was Mandy?

Lisa's eyes darted left and right; there was no sign of the other Ravenclaw girl. A second spider sat in her web, but she was too far away to pose any immediate danger.

No, wait! The spider was chewing on something. Her giant pincers were moving. There was a loud crunching sound....

Please, no! Oh, please, that couldn't happen!

Lisa raced downwards, stopping dead just over the giant animal and kicking at its head hard. The Widow straightened, looking up at the disturbance. Pincers reached for Lisa, but she had been expecting that, so she had no trouble sidelying them.

As she looked downwards she could make out what the spider was doing; broken pieces of broomstick tumbled from her mouth tools as they opened and closed lazily. The spider took no notice of them. Hard substances like wood weren't edible to her; she needed something softer. So she turned away to focus her attention on something else.

Lisa had not been able to see Mandy at first, because the other girl had lain beneath the Widow's hind body, hidden by the creature's massive form. Only as the spider moved, the Ravenclaw could spot her classmate's lifeless form.

There was a trickle of blood on her cropped hair and some more on one of the tree roots supporting the web. If she had hit her head on that root, it meant that she was only unconscious, didn't it? She would be all right.

Please, she had to be all right!

Lisa drew her wand, but her hands, stiff with all the cold, couldn't hold onto it. It

slipped through her fingers, dropping down into the sticky substance of the web. The spider didn't mind the tiny piece of wood; she was busy with something else. As she loomed over her prey, she used her front legs to turn the girl on her back.

Lisa didn't waste any time. She shot downwards, attacking the creature with her bare hands. It could only be seconds until Harry and the others were here to help her; all she had to do was keep the spider away from Mandy just a little longer.

She kicked at the spider again, aiming for the eyes. They had to be more sensitive than the heavily armoured head, she thought, but her blows didn't even seem to make the spider angry. In a placid, almost lazy move the creature reared up, using one of her pincers to shove her attacker off her broom.

The threads were incredibly sticky. Fortunately, Lisa had kept her calm as she tumbled down into the web, using only one hand to break the fall and keeping the other safely away from it. Her wand had to be close by, and if she had a free hand, she could try to reach for it. Her eyes darted about, feverishly searching for her only weapon. She breathed in deeply as she spotted it only an arm's length away from her, dangling from one of the threads.

She stretched out her arm, trying to reach it. Hopefully, her stiff fingers wouldn't desert her now; she *had* to grab the damn thing. She had to, or everything would be over. After what seemed like hours, she thought she could feel the hard wood at her fingertips, but she couldn't tell for sure; her hands were too numb.

In the next moment she was thrown roughly onto her back, giant spider's legs pressing her arms and legs to the sticky threads to make sure she couldn't struggle. The creature's weight pinned her down into the web as she desperately threw her head back and forth, the only part of her body she was still able to move.

That was until her chignon loosened and her long dark mane got caught as well.

The glistening green eyes of the creature stared at her coldly as the pincers moved aside to make room for the long, pointy suction tube spiders used for ingestion. Lisa squeezed her eyes shut so she didn't have to see it moving towards her.

Goosebumps raced along her arms and legs and her heartbeat pounded like a drum in her chest as she still saw the image in her mind's eye; the venomously pointed spike moving inexorably towards her belly. Automatically, her body tried to shrink back into the web, but her mind knew it was no use.

She felt a searing pain as the razor-sharp tip pierced her abdomen, and then she knew no more.

There was nothing but darkness around her, a complete utter darkness. Only once the

features of Padma—or was it Parvati? —emerged out of the blackness, only to fade back into it a moment later. Or was it hours? She couldn't tell.

She wasn't in pain any more, but she felt sleepy, so very sleepy. The darkness gave way to something else now; she was travelling through a world of strange forms and bizarre sounds.

Tattered images floated past her: the lake, the swamps, those horrible glistening green eyes....

And then the images faded away so that only the green eyes remained.

Yet they were no longer the eyes of a monster, but the friendly eyes of a human gazing down at her.

"Am I dead?" Her voice sounded a bit hoarse, but it was still her voice. Her hands gingerly palmed her stomach, feeling a bandage around it.

"No, not at all," said Harry Potter, smiling. "Thanks to our twins and their impressive healing skills, you're almost completely healed again. You'll be back on your feet soon."

"It was close, however," he added. "If we had come only a few seconds later, your chances would've been less than zero."

"It's so quiet ... where are all the others? Mandy?"

"That's because it's Saturday and everyone else is out in the lake watching the game. Mandy—well, as far as I know, she just snatched the Snitch from the Badgers and chances are good she'll do the same to us. Only Padma and Parvati took turns in checking on you."

"But you ... why are you here?" Utterly bewildered, she stared at him.

"Ron took over my post as referee. I wanted to be with you when you woke up."

"But why ... I mean, Quidditch is so important for you...."

Harry shook his head. "We don't live in a time for games anymore. Of course, sometimes we have to push it all away and just be happy, and that's why we decided not to blow the game off after your accident. Too many people worked too hard for it, and they deserve a little joy with all the terrible things they have to cope with."

"But it's still only a game, and it's not important. What you did was important. You saved Mandy's life by risking your own; that was a very brave thing to do."

"No, it wasn't." Hot tears spilled from her eyes as she continued. "It's all my fault! I jinxed Mandy's broom. I wanted her to screw up during the game so that the others would laugh at her and Terry would stop following her around."

She could feel her voice break into sobs, but the words just kept bubbling out. "I never imagined Mandy would fly her broom outside the hideout before the game. I thought she'd only fly it at the game and under water she wouldn't get hurt, even if she fell down. I never meant for her to get hurt. I never meant ... Oh, Harry, I've been so stupid! So childish. So...."

"I'm sorry, but I have to agree with you." He Summoned a handkerchief for her to dry her tears and blow her nose. "Under normal circumstances this would have been a school prank, and if we were back in Hogwarts, you would've lost some House points, got a couple of detentions and justice would have been served."

He gazed at her intently, until she lowered her eyes. "You know as well as I do that circumstances aren't normal anymore. You endangered others and you endangered yourself as well—and for what? We can't afford childish pranks like this, Lisa, not when we all need to rely on each other. We can't put our own petty interests before the safety of our classmates and certainly not before the crucial goal we are trying to achieve."

"Forgive me," Lisa sobbed desperately. She turned her head away; she still wasn't able to meet his eyes. "I'm so, so sorry! I can never make up for this!"

"You already did." With a gentle gesture he lifted up her chin so he could look at her face. "Don't try to bury yourself in feelings of guilt now. Talk to Mandy; this is between the two of you. If you want to ask someone's forgiveness, it should be her and not me. Only when things are OK between you and her can we consider this unfortunate matter closed."

"Do you really mean that?" Lisa asked hopefully. "Don't you ... don't you want to punish me or anything?"

Harry shook his head. "This is not about crime and punishment, and I certainly have no right to pass judgment on you. I'm not Dumbledore or some old wise wizard who knows about life. I only know that you took full responsibility for what you did and that you tried everything to repair the damage you caused, even by risking your own life. What more could be expected of you? None of us is perfect; we all make mistakes. So isn't the most important thing how we deal with our mistakes afterwards?"

She could only nod; she was far too moved by his words to find words of her own now. Besides, talking was wearisome, and she felt tired and exhausted from all the crying and brooding. Her health wasn't fully restored yet.

"The others will be here soon," Harry considered. "Maybe a little rest would do you some good, Lisa, especially before the talk with Mandy. I don't suppose it's going to be easy for you."

He stood up, gently smoothing her covers. Not that they really needed smoothing; it was simply a caring gesture.

"It shouldn't be that way," he said softly. "I know it shouldn't. We should be worrying about lessons and grades and love and Quidditch. All the matters important to children and teenagers...."

"There's something else, Harry," she mumbled, growing sleepier with each passing minute. "I want to resign as a Ravenclaw Prefect."

"If that's your decision, we'll accept it. Maybe, since we don't have proper teachers to appoint Prefects, the Ravenclaws could choose a new one by vote."

"OK. And Harry?"

"Yes?"

"I ... I do think that you're wise. Very wise."

"Please don't say things like that." He turned around in the door frame, and as he shook his head, she could see a deep sadness darkening his green eyes. "I've done things far worse and by far more foolish than jinxing a rival's broom."

Then he closed the sliding door and she was on her own.

She wondered what he had meant with his last sentence; he didn't seem the type for foolish things at all. But she was far too tired for mysteries now. She snuggled comfortably into her covers and soon sank into a deep dreamless sleep.

Tsuzuku (...to be continued)

*

*Dark night, nothing to see,
Invisible hand in front of me.
Scared to death there's someone near,
Scared to move but you can't stay here.*

*You know me, evil eye!
You know me, prepare to die!
You know me, the snakebite kiss!
Devil's grip, the Iron Fist!*

*

extra Extra EXTRA!!!!

*"Aaaah, my dark past is coming back to me. It's all my fault. *sob* I'm going to brood*

now."

"Wouldn't we like to know what poor Harry-chan did?"

"That's very simple. He had sex, lost his soul and then he killed people."

"No way. He had sex, then he turned into Potterfly and tried to merge with his lover in a beaming box."

"Yes way. He had sex, got brainwashed by an evil alien queen, and then he threw black roses all over the place and broke his lover's new pink moon wand."

"If you know the right answer, call Fred & George's studio and win a rose-shaped music box with a prince and princess in it. A green one, because all the other colours are taken."

"Of course we have to charge you 5000 Galleons for each call, but we aren't telling you that. Americans may pay in 100 dollar bills."

"Or come by and drop us a postcard. Don't be shy! Enter the shadow realm behind the mirrors to listen to our pointless ramblings."

"Or turn back and get out of here as fast as possible. Go, go! Now's your final chance!"

"What my gentle brother is trying to convey with his cautious words of warning: The worst is yet come!"

"Didn't like spiders? Well, try rats next chapter. Didn't like jealous girls bitching at each other? Well, how about some partying Death Eater boys spreading testosterone poisonings with their raging hormones. Didn't like Quidditch games? Watch what happens when the Blood Legion ravages Diagon Alley and the Ghost Riders aren't allowed to play."

"Yep, they're all back next chapter. Mackie Macnair and Toto-chan and the Malfoy ferret."

"Secret Conspiracies. Tempting offers. Mysterious assignments. Smiling schemers. Whispered promises. The forces of darkness return in: "

Amicus Draconis: 1st Cycle - Cycle of the Badger - Episode 4: Offers and Offerings

Original Airdate: March 2002

Coming soon to a fanfic archive near you....

Draco Dormiens nunquam titillandus

*

* * *

Author's notes: Okay, were to start with Fred and George?

I've already mentioned that I was always very tempted to include non-novel elements into my story, such as Anime, musical, song lyrics, script format, and stage play or movie elements in general. I also love to play with the barriers between story reality and reader reality.

So anyway, the Fred & George interludes are some of these weird elements confusing my poor readers. That means you. *hands out a round of pity* Actually, the roots of these little intermissions go way back to ancient Greek Theater, where people had a thing called *The Choir*. This choir was a group of actors who commented the play in between the scenes. You could say they created a bridge between the characters of the play and the audience. They gave their opinion on what happened to the characters, so most of the time they predicted that terrible, terrible things would come to pass and everybody would fall to their doom. That's why these plays were called tragedies. *eg*

The main inspiration for the Fred & George eye catches came from an Anime called *Shoujo Kakumei Utena* (Revolutionary Girl Utena). That show designed a parody on the Greek Choir, namely two (actually three) mysterious beings named *Shadow Girls*. These girls would always appear in the middle of each episode, making fun of the story and characters and often dropping mysterious hints on what was really going on and what would happen next. No one was able to figure out whether they were aliens, higher beings, spirits of dead people, ordinary school girls or maybe two girls watching the Anime and making fun of it.

Or maybe, all they are is a nasty joke from the director to confuse the audience. In Anime, anything's possible. ^^

Whenever the Shadow Girls appeared, they would do so with the line: *Kashira, kashira, gozonji kashira*, which roughly translates as: *Did you hear the latest rumor?* or literally *I wonder, I wonder, do you know what I wonder?*

So Fred and George happen to be my Shadow Boys now. In the original version of AD they're even weirder, talking in only small letters and without proper punctuation. But both my beta readers suggested I better use normal grammar in the English version, or people will think I'm making mistakes. So for once I decided to be a good Yamato, and cut back on the weirdness. I have to admit, it doesn't happen often.

More Author's notes: When we write HP fiction, there are some topics to deal with.

Jo gave us a detailed and enchanting world, but she also leaves a lot to our imagination. So we have to plan what our interpretation of the HP universe is going to be like.

In this note I'd like to address the topics of "Books vs. Movies", "Wizard Clothing" and "Same Sex Relationships" and how I decided to deal with them in my HP universe.

Books vs. Movies: The books are my first source of canon, but since Jo supervises the movies herself, I'm okay with them as well. I stick to book reality in terms of dialogues, plot and characters, and all the important issues. When it comes to the question of design, however, I often prefer the movie version, and sometimes I like to create my own, which differs from both the books and the movies.

Here's what I mean by design. An example would be the different clothing the characters wear in the movies, or the different design of the Chamber of Secrets and so on. In a movie you just need some eye candy. Since AD is based on Japanese Anime, the experts on bright colours and flashy images, it needs eye candy, too. So I gave New Hogwarts a shape changing hideout and I let the Ghost Riders thunder through the skies on demonic horses.

Wizard Clothing: What do wizards wear beneath their robes? When James turns Severus upside down, we get a good look at his underwear. But when Draco storms out of Madam Malkin's shop after chucking the green robes away, he's fully clothed. And why does an old-fashioned, pureblood wizard like Sirius' father wear trousers? Aren't those too Muggle for him?

I don't write too much about clothing, because I would bore the reader to death if I was constantly dressing and undressing characters. In general I stick a little more with the movie design, which means you wear your trousers, shirts or dresses beneath a set of robes or a wizarding cloak. In year X your fashion magazine might promote cloaks and open robes and it's okay to show your trousers. In year Y you absolutely have to wear closed robes, because trousers are bad Muggle things. Since fashion bounces back and forth in all Muggle societies, why shouldn't it do so in the wizarding world as well?

As for trousers, skirts, etc, I imagine pureblood wizards to be a little bit archaic. Long dresses for the women, perhaps medieval, Renaissance or Victorian styled, and the matching masculine counterparts for their husbands. Clothes like jeans, mini-skirts and tee shirts would rather be worn by young people, or people with Muggle ancestry.

Same Sex Relationships: Jo doesn't give wizards the same problems as Muggles; she always transforms them into wizarding equivalents. While Fascism in the Muggle world is based on skin colour, religion, or nationality, wizards base it on ancestry. It's no big deal whether your skin's black or white, but it matters greatly whether your father was an accountant or an employee at the Ministry of Magic.

So I've tried a similar approach for relationship issues. In my wizarding world no one cares whether you love a man or a woman, because there are other things to worry about. Can a wizard legally marry a giant? Will the daughter of a wizard and a Mermaid

be accepted at Hogwarts? Does the son of a witch and a Centaur get a fair trial, or will he find himself before the Magical Creature's Department?

So, same-sex relationships are an every-day thing in AD. Most characters don't define themselves as straight or gay anyways; they fall in love with someone as a person.

Yamato