

# Once Upon a Window Pane

*by dracontia*

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## Al & Scorp Show, Episode 4

*Chapter 1 of 1*

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(Fourth in a continuing series about Albus Severus and Scorpius-- sequel to 'Do Not Enter,' 'Elixir,' and 'Yule Be Sorry'.)

Disclaimer: These persistent little snots are not mine in any way, shape, or form, and I do not profit from their follies.

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"Careful with your robes," Albus said.

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Snape floated over to the trap door, glaring at the latest intrusion. With some surprise, he noted that his irritant/namesake was dressed in somewhat-the-worse for wear dress robes, and the person he was helping up into the shack wasn't his blond shadow.

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"Couldn't we do this some other time? For instance, when there's not a**Yule Ball** going on?"

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At the sound of the soft, feminine voice, Snape bristled behind his ghostly invisibility.

*I don't care what his father named him...if he's bringing some little slag here to...*

*Oh!*

*Oh...*

---

"I've been wanting to tell you about this for yonks now, Lils. Besides, I was going to go spare if Delilah gave me one more...look...like that."

Lily accepted Al's help exiting the trap door and carefully dusted off her robes. "Delilah is going to have you killed. You're going to need a crash course in gallantry from Scorpius if you want to finish the night unhexed."

"What? Hey, I can be gallant. I picked her up at the Ravenclaw common room, and took her arm to escort her to the dance!" He demonstrated his gentlemanly technique, escorting her from the trap door to the shabby little parlor where he and Scorpius generally wasted time together.

"Scorpius kissed my wrist when he came to pick *me* up, and we're not even on a real date."

"What?!"

"It was my wrist, Al, and he basically just brushed his lips in the general direction of my sleeve. There wasn't anything 'romantic' about it. It's all about making the other girls who see it fall all over themselves with envy," Lily said, her tone going slightly smug.

"Sure you don't want to ask the Hat to have another go at you?"

"That's not being Slytherin, that's just being a girl."

"God help us boys."

Lily laughed hysterically. "See why you can't leave poor Scorpius with Delilah for too long?"

"He can distract her for a little while. He's a better dancer than I am."

"I'll grant you that."

Albus made a face at her. Lily stuck her tongue out at him.

"Look, if she'd wanted to dance with him, she'd have given **you** the toffee leaves."

"That's the strangest logic I've ever heard."

"Well, it worked, didn't it?"

"Huh."

When no further response was forthcoming, Lily began to study their surroundings with interest. "So, what is it that I'm supposed to notice?"

"The ghost...the guy who stopped the place from burning down when Scorp blasted the spider."

"If you haven't seen him or heard him, how do you know it's a 'him'?"

"I just know."

"Okay." Lily walked from room to room, looking thoughtfully at the few, ragged furnishings. "Mr. Ghost? Are you here?" she asked politely. She stopped and touched the back of her head, blinking.

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For once, Snape's biting inner commentary deserted him. He couldn't help trying to touch Lily's slightly straggly crown of red hair, pulling back each time she showed signs of feeling the cold approach of his spectral fingers.

*Would you have looked like this if you were my daughter, or granddaughter? My very own Lily?*

---

Albus fumbled with something in his robes. Lily's sharp ears caught the sound and she peered inquisitively at the half-hidden bundle of foliage.

"What's that?"

"Oh, I just...er...I thought the place seemed sort of...well, it's Christmas." He muttered the spell that stuck the ragged little wreath of holly and ivy to the dusty mantelpiece almost apologetically.

"It's nice," she said encouragingly. She frowned a little and looked around the room again. Albus failed to notice, as he was still poking at the wreath in hopes of making it look a little less like it had been hastily assembled and smuggled in under a robe.

"It's sort of half-arsed," he corrected with a sigh.

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Snape glared weakly at Albus.

*You excel at breaking the mood, Mr. Potter. Although your assessment of that sorry bit of seasonal flora is unexpectedly astute.*

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Lily gave another little jump and smoothed her hair. "That's why you came here tonight. You wanted him to have something for Christmas."

Al pointedly ignored the substance of her statement and went straight for the subtext. "So, you can tell that he's here! I'm glad I'm not the only one."

"I don't see how Scorpius can miss him. I keep feeling little brushes of cold in my hair...just like when a ghost tries to touch you, then remembers at the last second that they can't." She smiled at the room in general. "I wonder if he was a grandfather. It reminds me of the way Grandpa always pats us on the head sort of absentmindedly whenever we walk by."

Albus blinked at her in complete bemusement. "Lily, Scorpius is pretty perceptive, despite his occasionally ditzzy behavior. If the ghost were giving us grandfatherly pats on the head, he would have noticed."

Lily simply laughed. "True. And really, he only gets silly when he's relaxed."

"When he's with us," Al murmured, having a sudden flash of insight.

"Hmm?"

"Nothing. On the subject of the ghost...it isn't that ghost-touch feeling, or even the cold generally, as much as it is the emotions. There's a sort of watchful, lonely, cranky feeling that's all over the place. Tonight, though, it's mainly just sadness." He paused a moment as if listening. "And crankiness," he amended.

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*And you call your little blond accomplice a nosy git. Stop blundering about in my feelings.*

---

"Al, you know that you're the only one in the family who's sensitive to that sort of thing," Lily said gently. "Remember the incident in Divination class?"

He sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. "Why does everyone insist on reminding me of things I'd rather forget?"

"Family privilege," she replied with a grin. "I'm going to hold Scorpius to his promise to Pensieve the memory for me one day."

"Give it to Professor Trelawney so **she** can relive it," he said flatly. "She's been trailing me like a niffler after Galleons, trying to get me to take her miserable class again."

"You think that you've got it bad...poor Scorpius is on the verge of dropping Divination because she keeps asking him about you. It's driving him barmy." She grinned at the memory of Scorpius' melodramatic re-enactment of the repeating Trelawney drama.

"Why doesn't he drop it? Then I wouldn't have to meet him there after, and we could both avoid her."

"You know that Mr. Malfoy would do his nut if Scorpius dropped a class."

"Point. I wonder why he took it again in the first place."

"So, if the ghost is cranky and makes it 'feel lonely' in here, why do you keep coming back?"

"I can't explain it. It's like... it's like when I know things about people. You, know, whether I can trust them or not, and things like that. I just know that he's an all right sort."

"Al, you tend to trust nearly everyone," she said gently.

"Well, there's something good about most people," he answered her equally gently, though he just as easily could have been defensive about it.

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Snape aimed another halfhearted glare at Albus.

*Your attempts to invoke my alleged 'good side,' Mr. Potter, are thoroughly annoying.*

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Lily contemplated the wreath again, touching her hair absently. "Maybe we could bring some more Christmas things here. It's sort of a grim place to have to haunt. And you're right; he seems such a nice fellow, it's a shame he's alone. I wonder why he doesn't visit the ghosts at the castle?"

"I don't think he likes that idea, Lils."

She sighed, feeling oddly disappointed. "All right, then. I guess he'd rather we didn't ask the other ghosts about him, either."

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*If you can 'sense' anything, sense this: Don't. Even. Think. About. It.*

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Al shuddered. "That would definitely be a bad idea."

"Oh, well. We can still visit."

"Me and you and Scorpius, at least."

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*Grammar, Mr. Potter. I know that it's a great deal to ask, but do try to refrain from being an utter Philistine in my presence.*

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Lily turned on him with a shrewd look. "So, this is where you two disappear to sometimes."

"Um..."

"It's OK. I won't tell anyone else about it. And I won't trample all over your precious clubhouse, contaminating it with girl germs."

Al wrinkled his nose at her, and she laughed aloud. Before he could comment, a chittering silver flash skittered across the floor from the direction of the underground passage. The siblings stared, wide-eyed in amazement, as it came to a stop at Albus' feet and squeaked "HELP!" before darting back the way it came.

Albus picked up the hem of his robes and ran after it. Lily followed.

"Was that Scorp's Patronus?"

"Yes!"

"Delilah is chewing him up and spitting him out, I expect," Lily said seriously.

"No kidding," Al said, wrestling the trap door open.

"Why is it a ferret?"

"No idea." He jumped down the hole, doing wonders for his abused formal wear in the process.

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Snape tried...and failed...to suppress a snort of laughter.

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Lily stopped, one foot on the top rung of the ladder. "Go on ahead, I forgot something," she called down.

"Are you sure you can manage alone?"

"I am a witch, brother."

"Right." His voice was already receding down the passage.

Lily stepped back on to the floor and put her hands behind her back, looking up and around and thinning her lips nervously. "Mr. Ghost? Is something funny?"

The silence stretched out, ultimately broken by a very soft sigh.

Before her and slightly to her right, a silver flicker like a cloak being twitched into place flared. She was unable to see anything of the size or shape of her taciturn

companion before it flickered out, leaving a very faint glow. The glow moved slowly towards one of the smoother, cleaner windows in the shack.

She followed hesitantly.

Words formed in the frost, written in cursive as sharp and brittle as the winter cold.

*Happy Christmas, Lily.*

A delicate sketch of her namesake flower formed beneath.

Her face dimpled up into a smile, cheeks pink.

"Happy Christmas to you, too, Mr. Ghost." She looked to the side of the window, searching the air for any trace of the wan light that had led her there. "May I, um, pass your greetings along to Al and Scorpius?"

After a long pause, more letters: *Perhaps another time.* All the words melted away, leaving only the suggestion of the lily...not noticeable to anyone who didn't already know that it had been there.

She was disappointed, but not terribly surprised. "All right, then. I have to go now...they probably need me."

There was almost a look of dry amusement about the last letters that appeared. *No doubt.*

"Goodnight, Mr. Ghost." She smiled in the direction of the now-blank window again, and carefully climbed back into the underground passage.

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Snape followed her, fuming silently.

*Foolish boy...leaving her to negotiate this nasty hole by herself.*

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Halfway along, they met Al coming back, the incorporeal ferret practically going into spasms around his ankles. At Lily's questioning look, he shrugged helplessly.

"I couldn't leave you alone down here. Besides, I know Scorpius...he always pushes the panic button a good ten minutes before it's absolutely essential."

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*You delight in contradicting me, don't you?*

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Scorpius had drawn on his stores of wit, charm, and dancing skill in the interests of keeping his friend's date entertained. Unfortunately, those stores ran out about five minutes ago, and said friend's date had drawn something else...her wand.

"Last chance, Malfoy. Who is he with?"

"I told you! For that matter, Albus told you! He and Lily had family business to attend to. He'll be back any minute now. Possibly any second." Scorpius' eyes darted frantically around the garden, willing it to be true.

"What kind of 'family business' would they need to take care of, right in the MIDDLE OF THE YULE BALL?" Her wand was out now, and this was officially ugly.

"Well, it's just conceivable that they had Christmas things to deal with, it being Christmas," Scorpius said.

It might have gone over better had he been able to restrain the sarcasm.

Fortunately, that was where Albus and Lily came in, the frazzled ferret evaporating once they reached the entrance to the rose garden. Scorpius was cornered against a snow-covered, magically-blooming rose bush, with Delilah's piercing blue eyes practically shooting sparks at him and her wand threatening to shoot something a little less benign.

"Hello, Delilah," Al said, his tone relentlessly bright.

Lily crossed to stand in front of Scorpius as if oblivious to the hostile wand pointed at him. "Rough night?" she whispered, trying not to laugh.

"Don't you 'hello' me!" Delilah said, wheeling on Al fiercely.

"Finally," Scorpius whispered, sagging with relief. He flung his arms around Lily's neck in heartfelt gratitude for his timely rescue. "Remind me to thank your dad for the Patronus lesson."

"HANDS OFF MY SISTER!"

Scorpius jumped approximately a foot. Four heads swiveled in the direction of that booming voice, to find James exiting a rosebush with his much-disheveled date.

Always walking the fine line between self-preservation and some peculiar (possibly genetically instilled) heroic impulse, Albus palmed his wand and assumed a reasonable, conciliatory expression. "James...Delilah...Let me explain..."

Scorpius blinked as he peeked around Lily's ear, having taken refuge as best he could behind her diminutive form. "Al... that's probably the single most useless phrase in the English language."

"I thought it was, 'This isn't what it looks like?'"

Lily started giggling uncontrollably...marveling at how, once again, Albus and Scorpius seemed to be operating in their own little world while potential mortal peril loomed around them. "Do those phrases get a lot of use down in the good ol' Slytherin common room?"

"The idea in Slytherin is not to get caught in the first place," Scorpius muttered. Lily stomped in the general direction of his foot, dinging his ankle, but kept giggling.

"So! You admit that there's something else going on!"

Al belatedly recalled what Lily had said about gallantry. "I'm sorry I was gone for so long," he said, blinking at Delilah with awkward contrition. He caught up the hand not holding a wand and managed to grace her with a quick peck on her wrist without going too painfully red in the face. "But I really did need to have a talk with Lily, privately."

Delilah's face went through a series of comically extreme expressions before melting into alarmingly gooey, romantic submission. "Oh, Albus!" she breathed, her wand arm going limp.

Lily gave her brother a discreet thumbs-up, and Scorpius mouthed, *Inspired* at him.

*Desperate* Albus clarified, mouthing the word silently over Delilah's shoulder. He simultaneously tried to keep a weather eye on James and tabs on where, exactly, Delilah was putting her hands, which suddenly seemed to have multiplied to a squid-like quantity.

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*Nice save*, Snape thought grudgingly as he hovered on the margins of the rose garden. It was the closest he'd been to Hogwarts in decades, and he was on edge. At least the little dunderheads were putting on enough of a show to make it worth the risk to his privacy.

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Honoria smiled and melted against James. "Aww," she cooed softly. "Aren't they sweet, Jamesy?"

Despite all his instincts screaming against calling attention to himself, Scorpius coughed desperately in an effort to hide his laugh. Lily, who had never managed to stop giggling, leaned against him for support. Even Al managed to quirk an eyebrow from beneath a somewhat advanced state of being glomped.

James was not about to be placated by a romantic tableau, especially after having his pet name aired out before God, siblings, and all the rosebushes. "Al, quit mooning over your girl and help me deal with your git of a friend, who was pawing our sister!"

The garden exploded with various degrees of indignation.

"He was NOT pawing me!"

"I didn't do anything of the sort!"

"Um, she's not...that is, God's sake, James, it was just a hug!"

Delilah waved her wand about alarmingly again. "I was in the Hall with Scorpius until just before we all met out here in the garden!"

"Wands down, Mr. Potter, Miss Perkins." As a Professor, **I need** to know why you're all standing about in the rose garden, wands drawn, instead of dancing indoors. The question is... do I **want** to know?"

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*Who...*

*...?*

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A relieved smile burst over Lily's face. "Professor Longbottom!"

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*Longbottom?*

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"Just a misunderstanding, sir," Albus said, gently deflecting Delilah's hand away from her recently stowed wand.

"Clear it up for me," Professor Longbottom said, casting his eyes over the assembled rogue's gallery in hopes of finding a reliable witness. "Miss Potter," he hastened to specify.

Lily managed to relay the basic story while committing only relatively minor sins of omission. If the manner in which Professor Longbottom was discreetly rubbing at his temple was any indication, he was well aware that he was hearing nothing but the truth, but still something short of the whole truth. Snape found the gesture jarringly familiar.

"I see." Professor Longbottom's gentle, patient expression never wavered; but combined with the tiredness in his voice, the overall effect was of someone addressing a mental defective. "Since we've established that no one is cheating on anyone else, that there is no mass debauchery involving friends or siblings, and that everyone's intentions are pure and honorable," he said the last so dryly that Snape nearly applauded, "shall we return to the ball?"

"Why does he always restate what you did so that you feel incredibly stupid?" Delilah muttered to one in particular.

Professor Longbottom (whose 'teacher's ears' would have done McGonagall proud...and Snape, if the torture could be invented that would move him to admit it) heard every word. "I learned from the best," he said.

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*Why you... you...*

*Damn straight, you did.*

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"And before I forget...five points each from Ravenclaw and Gryffindor, for threatening fellow students."

As Albus and Scorpius escorted their respective dates past the Professor, looking equal parts relieved and contrite, he said, "Consider seeing your dates back to their common rooms early tonight, gentlemen...you will be spending Boxing Day repotting my Honking Daffodils, and you should be alert. I'm not certain that either of you did anything worthy of a point deduction...assuming that there's anything left in your hourglass to remove."

"Yes, Sir," they replied meekly, counting themselves lucky to have escaped without exacerbating Slytherin's dismal house point situation. The four younger students scampered back inside. James followed with Honoria, trying to look as dignified as only a teenager smarting under a reprimand can manage.

"Oh, and, Mr. Potter? Miss Emerson?"

"Yes, Professor?"

He looked them over shrewdly, then flicked away a few stray rose petals and leaves from their robes.

"Two more points each from Gryffindor and Hufflepuff...for abusing my rosebushes."

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Snape laughed quietly all the way back through the tunnel. He settled into a position floating in front of the mantle and snorted one last time at the wreath (which really suited the place when you came down to it.)

"Happy Christmas, indeed."

FIN

Thanks again, peppermint, for taking the time to translate this from draconish into English!

