**A Flick of the Tail Fin**

by Zenithyl

**Summary**

Harry Potter is a carp—stubborn, hardy and capable of overcoming adversity.

He was just going for a swim... So how did exploring a river become scaling a waterfall, exactly?

**Notes**

This is the first fic of the Yu Long series that RenderedReversed and I have started. We will each write our own fics, but they will all link together. Credit for the original idea that gave birth to both this fic and the series goes to RenderedReversed.

All installments after this one will **not** be in chronological order.

We advise all readers to **always start with this fic before moving on to the rest of the series**, no matter whether you're going for chronological reading or in order of publishing!

I love flying. Feeling the wind through my hair and seeing the clouds underneath my broom. There’s
nothing better than soaring through the air, twisting, turning, only meeting the ground when landing or diving. Whether I’m playing Quidditch or simply flying for the sake of flying, any problems I have fall away against the heady feeling of flight. I thought nothing could compare to the joys of flying.

Because of my animagus form, I’ve come to love swimming too. It’s a similar kind of freedom, of movement in all directions. It’s very different too. Gravity is traded for stronger, less predictable currents. Height is changed to depth, air to water. Maybe because the differences are still similar enough I’ve found it is the one thing I love as much as flying.

The world below the water is so much like the one above the horizon. But I can’t really have both. I can only have one in each form.

To enter the sky I must be human, and rely on a broom. To enter the depths of the waters is to temporarily abandon the world above.

So I make time for both.

At Hogwarts I’ve got plenty of opportunities for flying, therefore I plan my time for swimming in the holidays.

In preparation for living alone when I have graduated, I have bought a house on the outskirts of a tiny village with a mixed population of magical and muggle. It’s an environment with lots of forest and some grassland, yet urban enough not to feel like complete wilds. There’s a river too. And a creek and a big pond. It was the pond that won me over; plenty big, fed by a few small streams coming from the creek, with a lot of different plants to investigate and a school of fish to talk to. None of them are my species though.

There are many goldfish—boy, do they love to chatter—in addition to some sturgeons—very serious, those guys—and a variety of catfish—the playful types, like their furry namesakes—plus a number of other fish I don’t know the names of, but no actual carps other than me when I visit. I’m a bit sad about that.

When I go out swimming I just take a plunge into the river or the creek and swim off to wherever I want. On the swimming days everybody knows they shouldn’t bother to find me. This includes the professors from Hogwarts, members of the Order and even the Ministry of Magic. Ministry officials now carefully take note and avoid dropping by on these days. Not that they had any choice after the number of pointless, panicked nation-wide searches they’ve had on the whereabouts of the missing Boy-Who-Lived.

Even I don’t know where I am most of the time once I have set off. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred I have to apparate back from wherever it is I ended up. It did help me perfect my apparition skills though—I can now apparate mid-leap while still in animagus form. Isn’t that a neat trick? It was so much fun when I played a prank with that, once!

For today I want to investigate where the river near my house comes from. This means I have to swim against the current, but I don’t mind. I have had many hours and days of practice with this over the last years and my instincts—animal and human alike—tend to drive me to go against the flow anyway. I think I must have explored at least half of Britain’s rivers, lakes and creeks by now.

As I set out for another swimming trip I wonder what it is I’ll find today.

“Let’s see… Harry, have you ever heard about the legend of the Dragon Gate?”
The trip has been long, but I’m not satisfied. I want more. More adventure, more exploration. A challenge! I don’t want boring old rivers and creeks without variation.

My golden-scaled body shoots through the water without meeting any resistance from the waves and barely any from the current, even with my size of two feet. Once again I think it’s fitting that Gryffindor’s Golden Boy is a golden carp. Even better is that I have some red on me too, in the form of slightly jaggy red bands at the bases of my fins—which are a little longer than average. This colour-scheme instantly made me Gryffindor’s mascot. Well, besides the official lion of course.

My fins, however, are silvery-white—not exactly a lion's colour. Still, I find it fitting in its own way. After all, the Hat did want me in Slytherin and only my insistence on not going there made it change its mind. While most of me is Gryffindor, part of me is still Slytherin, and I take pride in both.

My scar is visible in this form too. It’s a little spot on my head—at the exact place where my scar is in human form—consisting of a few tiny black-greenish scales in the shape of a faint zigzag mark. No one not aware of my other form thinks to look for it. Luna says she likes carps best of all fish species and that my particular variety—a koi—is her favourite. I’m honoured by this knowledge and I am glad that what they say about koi bringing luck is true. My friends and family are at least protected from bad luck.

“You haven’t? It’s a story of Chinese origin.

You still don’t know? Fine. Stop flailing around! I’ll tell you if you listen.

Where was it again…? Ah! Here it is.”

At some point, the rumble of a waterfall has become audible, I note now. I speed up even more and soon it enters my vision. It is a humongous one, judging from what I can hear, and it looks even more impressive to see up close from the lake at its bottom. Cascading water falls with so much force that the pounding noise it makes is overwhelming, drowning out most of my other senses, so to speak. I had been feeling the waves from the crashing water much earlier than I could hear their sound, though I hadn't paid attention to them until now.

The top of the fall disappears into the far distance and I vaguely feel a bit dizzy. Adrenaline starts coursing through my carp body just thinking about the might of the challenge I’ve found right in front of me. One that I will conquer!

“It’s said that carps love a challenge, which is why they can’t resist trying to reach the top of any waterfall they find.”

I wonder what the view is like at the top? Could I fly there sometime when I’m out on my broom? But I don’t want to wait to see it, not at all. So I’ll go up as I am now.

This golden carp will conquer this fall right here and now. I don’t care if I fail and have to try again and again, but I will make it one way or another!

With beats of my tail I’m off like a rocket. I try to get as much speed as I can before making the first leap into, onto the waterfall. The pressure of the falling water is strong, as expected, but I’m determined. If I let myself be discouraged when I’ve just started I wouldn’t get anything done, ever.

Let’s fight with Gryffindor courage and determination!

Another bound, followed by yet another leap, followed finally by an honest-to-goodness jump—but I'm not quite there yet and so continue in this vein. Until I’m at the top, that is. But I still have a long
way to go before I reach it. So for now: only breathing and swimming and fighting the current. Think of nothing but the goal I must reach.

“Any carp will try and jump all the way up.”

So on I go, jumping and swimming up. My apparition trick isn’t usable here; there’s too much whirling of the water, too much movement of the current, too little stability to leave or land safely. So there’s no way for me to cheat and make things easier. It’s either making it under my own strength or fail—there’s nothing in between.

I keep an eye out for predators that would want to eat me if they could. I’d have to change back if one catches me, but it would leave me out as a human in the middle of a waterfall—not a safe place to be. I can apparate away then, since I’d be out of the water partway at least, but it would make this challenge an automatic fail.

And I don’t want that.

“Undeterred by dangers ahead they will bound higher and higher.

Eagles will swoop down to snag themselves a carp for dinner.

Owls are likewise attracted by the lure of an easy meal.

Fishermen may catch the carp in their nets, or hunt it with spears and arrows.”

I swerve around a big broken tree branch that comes crashing down with the water, and then narrowly avoid a chunk of rock tumbling down right behind it. Clouds of marble-sized stones come at me every few yards but once in a while I meet bigger things on my path.

I can’t afford to let any of these big boys hit me. A crushed carp won’t be reaching any top of a fall, and I don’t want to shock my friends with the sight of one suddenly showing up. They’d have heart-attacks on the spot.

Speaking of spots, there’s sure to be more surprises from where the last few came from.

Avoidance is key.

“Debris swept along with the current needs to be avoided at all cost.”

A very rare spot of relative calm water helps me regain breath for a little while. Evening is coming and my time for swimming is running out, so I can’t stay in this spot long. Calm water or no, a real break is impossible to have in the middle of a fall—never mind taking an actual rest—where even in the far corners between the rocks scattered along the banks or among the water there’s still a strong current.

I’m protected from stuff that comes floating down with the flow of the stream and also from most unexpected sideways motions of the water, but the main current is relentless and keeps clawing at me. I hope I have enough strength left to last the rest of the way up.

One deep breath of water. Then I dive back into the stream.

“The current itself weakens the carp, tires it out, and may ultimately sweep it away.

Still, a carp will press on, flinging itself ever forwards and upwards.”
This is hard… I hadn’t expected it to be *this* hard…

But… I must continue… I’ve come too far to give up now.

That view had better be worth it!

“Out of many carps, over even more years, there may not be a single one to make it.”

I’m nearly there. The end is in sight.

Only about 10 yards left…

5 yards…

2 yards…

A single yard…

Two feet…

A foot…

And I clear the last section of the fall to land myself into the small lake at the very top. There are a few faint wisps of mist hanging over the surface of the water, but other than that the air’s completely clear.

I can see trees standing all around the lake. Some are full of blossoms, others have fruits of some sort that glister in the twilight. There are gaps between groups of trees that let me see much further. As I thought, hoped, the bits of the landscape that peek through these gaps are breathtakingly beautiful.

Dusk has fallen and it’ll be night soon. I’m due to be back by night-time, but I’m not done here yet. I want to look around some more, enjoy the result of my work of many hours. So now I turn my gaze down.

The water of the lake itself looks sort of luminous, the way I imagine liquid crystal to look. Now that I pay attention to it, the water at the edges is rather dark in comparison to the rest. The colour is getting lighter towards the middle, with the centre part looking white rather than the shades of blue that lie around it. I think it resembles a submerged orb of light that’s floating just below the surface.

The white attracts me and I follow the pull of my instincts towards this brightest spot right in the middle of the lake. When I cross the boundary into the shimmering ring of water lying directly around the white, it feels like I’m entering a warm bath. But I’m already submerged in water, so that can’t be right.

Being this close lets me see that my liking it to an orb was more truthful than I thought. It *is* a white ball of light that is glowing softly.

It’s pretty. It’s calming.

Something’s about to happen.

I can feel it resonate in my scales.

Something major is coming.

“But it is not impossible.”
An inaudible sound reverberates throughout the lake. It makes the branches of the trees sway, travels through water and air alike, yet doesn’t create visible waves.

It’s like a different version of phoenix song. A distant cousin maybe.

The sound calms me, the way phoenix song does, but it doesn’t feel the same. It invigorates, yes, but it also... urges me on to a point. A touch of nervosity creeps into me that grows stronger the longer I listen.

And when it reaches the peak…

The orb in front of me explodes into light—dyeing my vision white—and expands.

“Should one finally succeed, a reward for its colossal efforts awaits.”

When I come to I find myself floating in what seems to be a white bubble of light. It’s surprisingly comfortable—despite the limited space. I fit inside snugly along with a bit more room for manoeuvring.

A few swishes of my tail let me know that I can swim in the light as if it’s water. Curious to see what it feels like, I make a few circles inside the boundaries of the ball. I follow up with a number of flips just because I can. Once I’ve had my fun, I still myself to look around.

I haven’t paid attention to anything but the ball itself, but now turn my gaze outside and notice that the water is a ways below. And I’m not.

The orb is floating above the water, and the distance is increasing.

I’m unable to panic.

It must be due to the properties of the light. …Or something. I’m not really sure.

Oh… It stops moving now.

My scales suddenly begin to tingle, and it’s gently building up. The feeling is permeating my muscles too. They cramp a little.

Again my vision goes white, but this time my body does too—even more blindingly so. And then I start to change.

I feel my body as a whole stretch, elongate, becoming slender like a snake’s. So do my fins, and I seem to grow more of them too. It’s a strange feeling—as if all of a sudden I have a few extra sets of fully functional limbs. Even my barbels are getting longer until their shape make me think of long threads of wire. They drift on the currents of non-existent wind right past my eyes.

Speaking of my vision, it’s blurring and wavering, and my eyes hurt. Tears well up at the pain, but I close my eyes—carps aren’t able to blink, why do I have eyelids?—and will them away. Like this, I can feel that they are actually being moved! With my head changing shape, my eyes are moving to a different spot, probably going through their own change along the way. Luckily, the pain doesn’t last too long.

When I take a cautious peek from underneath my closed eyelids I at first think there’s someone or something else here with me—it takes me a while to realise that what I’m seeing is my own tail.

*Merlin, how did my tail grow so fast?*
My growth speeds up and the cramping becomes worse.

Carp’s aren’t supposed to have legs… But still, I can feel them developing. They’re muscled yet slender to match the rest of the changes I’m undergoing. Seems like I’m getting claws as well…

Nothing about any of this surprises me at this point.

I decide to close my eyes again and ride this thing out until the very end.

“It will be reborn.”

By the time the cramping and stretching goes away, night is on the verge of falling.

Once again I open my eyes, slowly.

The light of the orb has muted a lot, while the glow of my body has died down completely. The bubble has shrunk, or maybe I grew too much. No matter which one happened, the space between the edge of the bubble and me is smaller now compared to before. In fact, I’m touching the boundary at many places—even completely curled up as I am.

The wall of the bubble feels sort of squishy and elastic. It’s like a thin layer of transparent rubber or supple plastic has been spread out over and around me. When I push, it gives way, and when I push harder, it seems to stretch out of existence—and disappears.

Instinctively I uncurl when the bubble is completely gone and somehow stay afloat above the lake, trying to reorient myself—and relocate the limbs I’m still in the process of getting used to.

It is only when I glance down that I realise the enormity of what has happened.

A serpent-like creature gazes back at me from the reflection on the water. A number of fins run over its back, alternated by plumes of sorts that flow and twirl around like airy, feathery streamers. Longer versions of the plumes are also found on the legs, hips and shoulders, arranged like locks of hair on each joint.

The tail is about the same length as its neck and gets ever smaller towards the end, where it sports a big tuft of plumes of different lengths—all coloured fully red and orange. The thinnest part, right before the plumes start, can be encircled with the thumb and index finger of a single hand. The thickest part of the tail matches the belly in size.

Its long body, up to its barbels, is covered in golden scales bordered with faint lines of silvery-white—except the fins, plumes and tail, where the gold is gradually replaced with shades of orange and red. Horns on its head—which look more like a pair of antlers that has all of its branches on the outer sides—are coloured a beautiful shade of light-green that I think is best described as jade. They lie nearly flat on a bed of more red-orange plumes.

The scar-shaped spot made of tiny blackish scales is still there, but it might as well be invisible for how small it is in comparison of the size of the head. Its eyes are, of course, the familiar shade of emerald I see in the mirror every day.

Four slender legs sport five long, curved claws each, making them look like the legs of an oversized eagle, or the front paws of a hippogriff—but much more elegant. The shoulders and hips positioned just so that the total length of the body is perfectly divided in three parts.

The head looks fierce, yet calm and wise—an image that is amplified by the long, long barbels and a beard-like appendage on the chin. This creature looks young; childlike, adventurous and old;
powerful, knowledgeable—at the same time.

As I stare at the image the knowledge hits me that this is not just some beast that happened to stop by to watch me—well, pottering around, trying to get a grip on the situation—this, this is me.

*This is me.*

*I am a dragon!*

*“Or so the legend goes…”*

…but clearly there’s more to this than just a legend.”

I quietly sip from my cup of pumpkin juice as I listen to the story. My heartbeat is by now back to normal after having had a lengthy trip to the higher ranges for the last hour or so.

“As you know, some places in the world are somehow more magical than others,” Hermione continues to lecture me. “Think of the Veil in the Department of Mysteries or the tops of certain mountains like the Olympus or Fuji—”

I absolutely love that girl. She took it in stride when I barged in, frantic and panicked, with a fantastical story about the top of a waterfall and having my animagus form change into a different one—and then proceeding to show her.

She didn’t hesitate to calm the panicking me, made me change back, put me onto a chair, had Ron fetch me a drink while she rushed to get relevant books, and then launched into a full explanation with no break in between.

Ron’s still speechlessly gaping at me at the moment. He has been since he came back with my pumpkin juice… and something much stronger for himself. Did I finally break him? *I’m so gonna test that theory later*—when I’m not busy trying not to freak out.

“The very top of any waterfall where transformations like this happen is called a Dragon Gate. I think it’s yet another example of a magical hotspot. From what I understand, a carp that reaches such a Dragon Gate will somehow interact with the magic of the Gate, and evolve into a species of dragon aptly known as a Carp Dragon.”

“So that’s where that bloody legend’s retarded name comes from…” I hide a snort at the words I hear Ron mutter. If he can say things like that, his brain must be back in business.

“There are only few written accounts of the legend left in existence, all written by Chinese wizards who either witnessed or studied this phenomenon. Oral stories are found aplenty—magical and muggle versions alike—but they’re just too unreliable. Luckily there’s much more information available on the type of dragon it results in. The details on the story itself, however, are all very vague everywhere, including the books, which is logical, seeing as they’re thousands of years old without exception and that—”

Uh-oh. She’s off again.

While Mione rambles on in the background about ancient Chinese wizarding scholars and the merits of good documentation Ron comes over to me and claps me on the shoulder. “Well, whatever’s the cause of it, know that I like your new form, mate. You’re a bloody dragon!”

Before I can answer, agree, say anything, he flees the room to burn off the excitement that had him jumping like an over-enthusiastic house-elf for the few seconds it took to speak the words. Knowing
him, the excess energy will likely be put into either eating or Quidditch. Or a combination of the two.

Meanwhile, I just stay seated and ponder over what I’ve just read from the book Mione had shoved into my hands before her lecture, in a passage she had helpfully pointed out for me.

It says these Carp Dragons are named Yu Long and are classified under the branch of Eastern dragons. Unlike Western dragons, they are creatures of two domains rather than just one—the Western dragons are solely of the air.

“…In contrast to Western dragon species, Yu Long (like many of their branch) are beings of both air and water…”

Sky and sea.

I couldn’t fight the delighted smile breaking out on my face.

Now I have them both.

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