

The Filius Files, part 2: Duelling Champion

by Pyttan

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It was a lovely afternoon with the cold winter light pouring into the teachers' lounge.

Filius was sitting in his favourite armchair in front of the fireplace where a small fire was flickering sipping his tea and reading the gossip column in *The Daily Prophet*.

The professors of Hogwarts were gathering as they always did at the end of the day. First Minerva and Pomona entered. Seeing him, they both nodded and smiled. He nodded back, and they sat down by the window, Minerva marking papers and Pomona reading. Then Albus joined them. He smiled and sat down, started to suck on one of his ever-present sherbet lemons and buried his nose in *The Quibbler* of all things.

Then came Severus. It was clear that his huge beak of a nose had been put out of joint, for one reason or the other. Not that it was uncommon. Thankfully everyone knew better than to ask him what had happened. Severus did have a tendency to bottle things up. He got very angry, made one or two snide remarks and then seethed until he snapped and had one of his magnificent tantrums, scaring everyone in the vicinity half to death. Ergo, everyone pretended not to notice Severus's foul mood.

In all, it was a normal day and a pleasant one at that, Filius thought, returning to his paper after another look around the room.

Then the door banged open, making him jump in his seat.

"Dear friends! I have had the most amazing idea, if I may say so myself!"

It was Lockhart, the dolt of the decade, sweeping into the room dressed in yards of lavender silk.

Filius closed his eyes, his throbbing temples telling him that a headache of gargantuan proportions was coming on. At the beginning of term, he'd had to be around Lockhart for a couple of hours before it started to set in. Almost four months later, Lockhart's voice was all it took to trigger it. He had read a Muggle book about it once. Pavlov, bells and drooling dogs.

"You had an idea. How ... interesting." Severus's slow drawl lacked any expression, and Filius couldn't help smirking.

"Yes. In these turbulent days, I strongly feel that the students should nay must learn how to defend themselves."

Lockhart took up a dramatic pose in the middle of the room as he spoke, making Filius want to groan in dismay. This would take time. And what in Merlin's name was the man thinking wearing those robes?

Albus put down his paper and looked at Lockhart over the rim of his glasses.

"And what might that idea entail, Gilderoy?" he asked.

"I firmly believe that the school is in dire need of a duelling club."

Filius could see that Albus was considering the idea. It wasn't an altogether bad one, surprisingly.

"Yes," Albus said. "Why not? Duelling can be fun and might come in handy."

"I do understand why it hasn't happened yet," said Lockhart. "Considering the age of the staff. Slow reflexes are not a good thing when teaching duelling. And forgetfulness would also be a problem, I imagine. But it is just as well. It's always good to know one's limitations." Lockhart smiled at the room in general and added, "But now you have me!"

Lockhart flashed them another smile. Filius assumed it was the prize-winning one. He didn't think it would do him much good in this company though. Was the man doing this deliberately? Because, really, no one could be this obtuse.

Filius dared a quick glance around the room. The look on Minerva's face didn't bode well.

Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus was such a solid piece of advice, he'd always thought. However, at this moment *Leaena dormiens nunquam irritare* was something that should more acutely be heeded. At least it was something Lockhart should heed. Filius felt an urge to shout *Accio Minerva's wand* and then run for it, in an attempt to stop the threatening carnage. He liked Minerva and didn't want to see her in front of the Wizengamot.

Oblivious of the fact that the lioness was ready to pounce, Lockhart prattled on.

"The only thing is that I would need someone to partner me ..."

Lockhart gave them a meaningful look.

"I took you all into consideration, of course. First, I thought of my own house and how nice it would be if the present Head of House would do me the honour. But, Pomona, we are all aware that the years have taken their toll and you prefer to potter about in the green houses."

Lockhart gave Pomona a superior look.

"After all, we all know that you will probably retire soon, and I am sure you prefer peace and quiet your last days at Hogwarts. It must be a relief to you, knowing that there is another Hufflepuff Professor at Hogwarts now. Your students will be in good hands whenever you choose to retire." He smiled at Pomona and then had the gall to wink at Albus.

Pomona gave Lockhart a sharp glance and if Filius heard it right growled. Pomona had never growled as long as Filius had known her. As she retreated further into the depth of her armchair and buried her nose in what appeared to be a Muggle gardening magazine, he wondered if Lockhart was aware of the fact that badgers are highly aggressive animals and that devil's snare stays very much alive and well when protected by a duvet.

"Then I thought about you, Albus," said Lockhart. "At first, I thought you would be a perfect partner, remembering how you faced Grindelwald and won. You were great once. But then I realised: you have been a school administrator for years now, and you are probably in dire need of brushing up on your duelling abilities. Something you hardly have had the time to do." The smile Lockhart gave Albus was so obsequious that Filius felt nauseated.

Dumbledore had obvious problems containing himself. His nose twitched, and his eyebrows travelled up and down his forehead.

"Quite correct, Gilderoy, quite correct," said Albus, sounding benign but choked.

"Then I contemplated you, Minerva, but as apt as you are, Transfiguration is slow work. Calculations. Formulas. To match me, you would need a little more than that," said Lockhart, and for a couple of seconds Filius was convinced that Minerva intended to prove Lockhart wrong. He readied himself to make a hasty retreat if he had to. Somehow Minerva contained herself though and settled for a curt nod in Lockhart's general direction.

Severus's perpetual scowl was more pronounced than ever, and his head had fallen forward. He had even drawn his upper lip back, baring his teeth. Filius hoped that what was going to happen wouldn't, but then, of course, it did. Lockhart turned to Severus, with the inane smile still on his face.

"And then I thought about you, Severus, but I wasn't sure about how up-to-date your duelling skills are," Lockhart said. "My main concern was the amount of time you spend in that dungeon of yours, brewing."

Lockhart adopted a serious mien.

"Then I realised why," said Lockhart, lowering his voice in a theatrical whisper. "You are hiding. And I understand. With your ... disfigurement ... " Lockhart gestured towards his own, perfectly shaped nose.

Filius's stomach churned.

The casual taunt so familiar to him in the way it honed in on one's weakest point, honed in on the thing one hated most about oneself was so deeply deplorable.

"I realised it would be cruel to ask it of you. Putting you on display ... " Lockhart gave Severus a compassionate look.

For a fleeting moment, Severus's withdrawal was evident.

He folded in on himself, and for a fragment of a second he looked vulnerable. Then Severus straightened, sneered at Lockhart and turned away. The room was quiet. Filius knew with absolute certainty that everyone wanted to do something in support of Severus. And he also knew with the same certainty that every sign of sympathy would be rebuffed.

And then Lockhart turned to him with his face beaming. And Filius knew, like before, what was coming.

"And that leaves you, Filius. Hogwarts' own great, little duelling champion!"

Filius squeaked and fell off his chair.

His own show, and he was good at it. He always fell off something the first day with the new first years. It relaxed them. Relaxed students meant better spell-work. Better spell-work meant fewer injuries.

"Oh, dear," he said. "That would be nice. So flattering." He made a show of flustered agitation.

"Never mind, never mind. Old you may be, but I have no doubt that you want to re-live your glory days, and I promise I will go easy on you," said Lockhart, obviously satisfied with the response.

For a couple of moments the room went still, the undercurrents hostile.

Albus cleared his throat. "So, when did you plan on starting this little venture?" he asked.

"Monday next week, if it will suit my partner," answered Lockhart, pulling Filius to his feet.

"That will suit me very well indeed," said Filius as he got up.

"Well, it's all settled then. I will put up notes on the message boards in the common rooms," Lockhart said. "I'll be off. Shaping young minds takes time and effort, after all. We all have to plan and prepare our lessons." With that, he left the room in a flurry of silk.

"Headmaster," said Filius, as soon as Lockhart was gone.

"Yes, Filius?"

"I think I'm coming down with something."

Filius sat down and made an effort to look miserable.

Albus gave him a worried look. "You're feeling ill?"

"Yes, very much so," said Filius.

"Do you need to go and see Poppy?" Albus was looking curious now.

Albus had never been stupid. Filius had always wondered why Albus hadn't been placed in Ravenclaw that once upon a time when he had been sorted. On the other hand, he had always wondered about Severus, too. And the Granger girl. And the Weasley twins. Not to mention Diggory.

He wondered about that idiotic hat sometimes.

"I think it's necessary, yes."

Albus rose from the arm chair where he had been sitting.

"Can I aid you somehow?"

"Yes, please. I would be much obliged." Filius stayed seated.

"Come then, I will help you. Can you walk or shall I drift you?"

"Drifting would be nice. I'll meet you back here Monday next week then. After classes are done."

Albus sat down again, looking keenly at him. Filius noted that the others in the room were doing the same. Even Severus. And Severus didn't do curiosity. Or at least he never showed that he did.

"Oh," Albus said. "How very unfortunate. You will not be able to partner Lockhart after all?"

"No, I will be too sick for that."

"I suppose we have to cancel then. Such a shame," said Albus, eyes twinkling.

"No, not at all. I have a replacement," said Filius. "Severus will take my place."

"Me?" asked Severus. "I think not."

"Yes, you, and I think so." Filius tried to look stern. He didn't do stern well, but it was worth a try.

Severus just cocked an eyebrow at him.

Filius sighed. "Do you remember those crystal vials I arranged for you to buy? Imbued with Sami elemental magic?" he said.

Severus had made sneering into an art form, he noted.

"Do you know how big the Sami population of the world is, Severus?"

"I have no idea. Not large I assume."

"The estimated Sami population is about 70,000," said Filius. "By way of comparison, the UK has an estimated population of about 62 million."

Severus once again cocked that annoying eyebrow at Filius.

"I fail to see what you are getting at," Severus said.

Filius knew that Severus didn't fail to see at all, but if Filius needed to make his point with a long-winded rant, that was what Severus was going to get.

"Even if the Magic population ratio is much higher among the Sami than in the UK, we are still talking parts per thousand, Severus."

Severus opened his mouth as if to say something, but Filius pressed on.

"Yet, I not only procured those excellent and, if I may say so, very pretty high quality vials but I also found a Sami witch willing to imbue them for you. There are 47 witches and wizards of Sami origin in the world today: 22 of them too young for advanced magic, ten too old and feeble and three hermits who refuse to have anything to do with people. That leaves 12, seven witches and five wizards, and only three of them capable of that kind of magic. All of them very hard to reach, since they prefer the traditional Sami lifestyle." Filius paused for effect. "It wasn't easy."

Severus pursed his lips and exhaled. "How very un-Ravenclaw of you Filius."

"Thank you. You will be helping me then?"

"Putting it that way, I will, of course, stand in your place."

Filius smiled. Severus had always understood the principle of favours and favours in return better than most.

"Since you are forcing me into this, is there anything in particular you want me to demonstrate?"

"No, not really. We all have our own teaching styles, and a lesson can be taught in many different ways."

Filius could see that the last sentence made Severus's impressive brain work around Lockhart's horrible taunt and the imagined wrong from him. Severus was starting to see the opportunities.

Minerva and Pomona were watching them by now, neither one of them even pretending to read.

Something flickered in Severus's eyes, and then he smirked.

"I'll make sure something is taught."

"Just one thing," said Filius. "Don't do anything that would put you in Azkaban. I find changes of colleagues very strenuous."

Severus's mouth twitched in an unfamiliar manner. It took Filius a second to realise that Severus was suppressing a smile.

"I'm sure I can think of something acceptable with enough ... impact ... to illustrate the importance of being able to block unfriendly spells," said Severus.

Filius smiled at Severus and continued to smile as he returned to his gossip column and his tea.

His headache was gone now and it was, after all, still a lovely afternoon.