

The Filius Files Redux: How Scrimgeour Got His Limp

by Pyttan

How did Scrimgeour get that limp of his?

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: JKR owns the characters. She also gets all the money, and I earn nothing.

Author's Notes: The generous lash_larue had a first look at the story, and when she did, she gave me ideas. The lovely celta_diabolica had another look at it, which generated more ideas. This is the end result, and I want to thank the two of them so very much for their help.

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How Scrimgeour Got His Limp

Part One

Filius listened to the two girls on the other side of the table, feeling his stomach do a slow, nauseating roll.

In theory, it had been such a great thing to team up with Irma and Minerva. 'In theory', being the key words. Because those two together were dangerous.

"I think we could get the muscle tissue to liquefy without affecting the bone," said Minerva.

"I saw something about melting...", said Irma.

Minerva tapped her finger against a paragraph in the book that was lying open between her and Irma on the table.

"If the tissue melts, it can't be restored."

Irma was frowning at the text that Minerva had commented on, but nodded nevertheless.

The mental images that the exchange incurred made bile rise in Filius' throat, and the sour sting of it even managed to reach his mouth before he could swallow again.

"Filius, are there any Charms that come to mind that would be of any help?"

Several did come to mind, but he wasn't going to tell them that. He had to put his foot down. Or at least try to.

"We would need to conduct experiments on living creatures, and ... well ... that's a bit of a problem, you have to agree."

Irma and Minerva's glares made him feel even smaller than usual. Which was saying something.

"We'll try it on ourselves. We'll draw straws. Problem solved," Minerva said.

She leaned over the parchment in front of her, scribbling something while she, every once in a while, glanced at the book. She was obviously feeling that the matter was settled. And Irma had buried her pretty nose...beaky, but still pretty...in another book the two of them had been perusing in search of something ... morbid, he had to suppose under the circumstances.

The more morbid the better, it seemed. Funny that someone as sweet as Irma could have such an unhealthy interest in gore.

"We could turn it in as an abstract," Filius said.

The suggestion was worth a try. If he managed to convince them, he might save the staff and students of Hogwarts the doubtful pleasure of watching him...since he always ended up with the shortest straw...trying to ooze along the corridors of Hogwarts with liquefied or dissolved muscle tissue.

"If we put our minds to it, I'm sure that we could come up with a counter-spell to add to it too." And he might need to clarify that in case he'd given them any new brilliant ideas with the statement. "To the theory, I mean."

"Do you have to be so negative?" Minerva asked. "This is interesting!"

"But Filius is right. And it could be lucrative. We should have a counter-spell. Counter-spells always sell," said Irma.

And of course she would say that. She was such an opportunist that it had to be admired.

"We don't have to decide today," said Minerva, who had given up her scribbling after glancing at her watch. She put two books and three rolls of parchment in her huge bag. And it needed to be huge. After all, she did carry around what Filius assumed was the complete collection of everything ever written about Transfiguration, on what seemed a permanent basis.

"I have a previous engagement," Minerva added and hoisted the bag over her shoulder. Only a swift evasive manoeuvre on Irma's part saved her from being clocked over the head by the gigantic bag of books. Minerva, thin as she was, was much stronger than one would expect, judging from the forceful swing.

Irma smirked at her. "What's his name, this previous engagement of yours?"

"Why do you assume it's a him?" asked Minerva, as she gave Irma a look down her nose.

"You blushed. You usually don't."

Minerva blushed even rosier this time.

"You do know that we will find out who he is, do you not? And really, isn't it so much easier and less embarrassing for you to tell us now, rather than having us sneaking around, showing up in the most awkward places, at the most awkward moments?" asked Filius as he gave her the sunniest smile he could muster.

"Indeed. Imagine me and Filius peeking at you and your ... previous engagement ... from behind one of the suits of armour or gargoyles or tapestries."

Irma's comment made Minerva bite her lower lip. Uncertain if they meant it, was she? If so, he needed to get into the fray and finish this.

"And they are abundant, too. Conveniently strewn all over the castle, in fact. You can find one or the other in every nook and every cranny of the building. They will come in quite handy. And I have the added benefit of being able to fit myself into the smallest of places," Filius said.

Minerva rolled her eyes heavenwards, but Filius could see a smile lurking. Minerva was giving in.

"This is only to stop you two from embarrassing yourselves beyond both redemption and repair. I'm going for a walk down by the lake with Rufus Scrimgeour."

Filius caught a movement in the corner of his eye; something hit the marble floor with a dull clink, and then came the sound of shattering glass. Irma disappeared from view almost at the same instant.

"Oh dear! How on earth did you manage that?" Minerva drew her wand and vanished the remains of the broken inkwell while Irma, now kneeling on the floor, vanished the spilt ink.

Irma, chewing on her lower lip, was avoiding looking at Minerva.

That had to be bad news, knowing Irma as he did. But why would she be so upset over her inkwell?

The answer being that she wasn't upset over the inkwell of course. So why was she upset?

They had been talking about ... Scrimgeour? Rufus Scrimgeour: arrogant bastard extraordinaire?

But of course that would be it.

"It's Hogsmeade weekend soon. We can always look for a new one," said Minerva.

"Aren't you going to go with Scrimgeour, then?" asked Irma, still without looking at either Minerva or Filius. Not that Minerva seemed to notice.

She really was incredibly dense sometimes.

"Yes, but..."

"You should go with him if you like him that much," said Irma.

Minerva smiled and looked at her watch again. "Thanks! I really do have to go now"

"Hop along, then. We can continue this tomorrow."

"Hop along"? Really, Irma!" said Minerva with another amused smile, and she set off at a brisk pace.

Filius watched as she left the library and then glanced at Irma. She had gotten up from the floor and was sitting at the table again, running her index finger in a slow circle over the spot where the inkwell had been moments before.

And the silence was starting to get loud.

He could take the plunge. Or not. Or improvise with great caution.

That would be it.

Caution.

"I didn't know you were so fond of the ... inkwell."

Irma stopped her tracing and looked at Filius, cocking her head and looking a bit like an owl studying a mouse. Then her eyes filled with tears.

No. That was not fair. He was bad at comforting crying girls. He just ended up crying himself. He could get back at Scrimgeour for her though.

She dragged the edge of her sleeve over her eyes and sniffed.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know how much I liked it until now."

"You never mentioned how you felt about it."

"I'm not in the habit of discussing my inkwells with anyone. It would feel odd."

Filius couldn't help it: he giggled. And wasn't that why he adored Irma just a little bit?

"Well, inkwells are a sensitive subject. And I suppose that there are fond memories connected to this particular one?"

"Some. But I had expected it to be more. I had the impression that the inkwell might even be with me next weekend."

"You planned on taking it to Hogsmeade?"

"It was rather a case of the inkwell taking me."

"You mean..."

"That it's a faithless inkwell that I'm well rid of, yes."

"But then it seems Minerva might need a new inkwell too?"

"Indeed. But how do I go about telling her that?" asked Irma.

At least he could answer that accurately.

"You don't. He needs to ruin it himself."

Part Two

The inkwell was of the shape of a raven chick, its head bent back and its beak open. Its mother hovered protectively above it looking at it in a way that seemed almost loving. It was so very pretty, and it would suit Irma so well.

"Take this," said Mr Scrivenshaft, handing Filius a quill and smiling almost mischievously. "Now. Try it. Go ahead and put the tip in the chick's beak."

How very interesting!

Why would Mr Scrivenshaft want him to try it out? Filius put the tip of the quill in the chick's mouth. The mother raven came to life, flapped her silver wings, gave a shrill crow and snapped the quill in half.

It was an amazing charm! But uncomfortable if one wanted to actually use the inkwell. So there had to be more to know about it.

He didn't have to ask.

"If someone besides the owner tries to dip a quill or touch the inkwell, or steal it, it bites. It bites quite hard too. You have to own it to be able to use it. To own it you need to buy it," said Mr Scrivenshaft.

That might be a bad thing.

"I had planned to give it to a ... friend of mine?"

"Indeed, it's a fine gift to buy for a friend. But, alas, you can't give it away. Your friend needs to buy or barter it from you. You need to agree on a prize."

But then it was all right. He would agree on her buying it from him for a knut. It would be perfect. And a knut Irma could afford.

"I'll take it," Filius said and smiled at Mr Scrivenshaft.

Filius paid, stepped outside and looked at his pocket watch. One o'clock. He still had time to go to Gladrags and fetch the new cloak he'd ordered before meeting up with Irma and Minerva.

He turned right into the alley where Gladrags was located and almost missed the couple who were standing in the shadows of one of the doorways.

Then the boy spoke. The dark drawling voice made all the hair on Filius' head stand on end.

Unbelievable. Rufus Scrimgeour. He must have thought about the miserable rotter too much of late, thus calling him forth.

Scrimgeour looked uncommonly sneaky glancing over his shoulder, giving the impression that he was ensuring himself that he and whoever was with him were alone.

As if Filius was even remotely interested in watching him snog. And he'd missed the fact that Filius was there anyway. The idiot.

And now Filius most definitely wanted to get away. He wondered if it was possible to remove mental images as well as memories, because he really didn't want to live with the image of Scrimgeour and Minerva kissing.

"Don't do that!"

It was the girl speaking, and something was wrong. Because that wasn't Minerva's voice. That voice belonged to Pomona.

Filius heard Scrimgeour chuckle, and then he spoke.

"Come on, Pomona. I'll settle for a small one. Maybe two. You know you want to."

"I don't want to! And I thought you and Minerva ..."

"We're just friends. I always wanted to get to know you better, though."

"If you want to get to know me, we could pair up in one of our classes." The pleading note in her voice, just one step from begging to be let go, made Filius cringe with distaste over what Scrimgeour was doing, and from the appearance of it, enjoying himself.

"I was thinking along the lines of simply pairing up," Scrimgeour said.

Scrimgeour's movement was so swift that Filius had trouble taking it in since it was also so audacious: He grabbed poor little Pomona...who seemed very small compared to him...and pulled her up against his chest.

"Hullo," Filius said, and that made Scrimgeour flinch so hard he jumped a foot straight up and let go of...or rather, dropped...Pomona in the process.

"Why are you two standing here?" Filius asked.

Pomona blushed and made her way past Scrimgeour, clutching a bag from Gladrags to her chest.

"We were just chatting." A smooth delivery on Scrimgeour's part, Filius had to admit.

Scrimgeour looked straight over Filius' head then, ignoring him. Such a strange thing to do, staring over someone's head like that. It couldn't be helped; Filius threw a quick glance over his shoulder.

He hadn't realised that Pomona was now standing behind him, and as it seemed, felt the need to use Filius as a buffer between her and Scrimgeour. Rather funny, really...or would have been, if the situation hadn't been so distasteful. Because it might be her worst idea ever, since she, even hunched behind him and small to begin with, was a full head taller than Filius was.

"I was heading over to the new coffee shop, Pomona. You know the one in the corner? Why don't you join me?" said Scrimgeour.

Filius threw a glance over his shoulder. Pomona didn't look enamoured with Scrimgeour's idea at all.

And it would be nice to yank his tail.

"Very sorry, old chap," said Filius. "Pomona is joining me, Irma, and Minerva at the Three Broomsticks."

"What?" Pomona's voice was no more than a small squeak.

A pang of cold spread in his chest. Was he wrong? Was it some kind of game the two of them played?

"Yes ... yes! We decided that yesterday, didn't we, Filius?" Pomona's voice was much stronger now. Decisive even. Thank Merlin, he'd assessed the situation right, because a sullen Pomona was a very sullen thing indeed.

And the look Scrimgeour gave Filius at that moment was very much akin to the one he'd always imagined a Hippogriff would dole out to a particularly annoying magpie right before gobbling it up.

And that look made Filius want to hit Scrimgeour right on his perfect nose.

Which he couldn't reach.

Not even if he jumped.

Part Three

Filius disliked being angry.

The churning stomach.

The aching shoulders.

And, eventually, the migraine that made it feel like his left eye was going to pop right out of its socket, and which really had no charm at all. No charm what so ever. Much like Rufus-bloody-Scrimgeour.

But what to do about him? Handsome and tall of stature. Opportunistic and arrogant of mind.

And he liked short jokes. The bastard.

The dreadful truth was that people like him never got what they deserved. Not really.

It was pure luck Filius had bumped into Peeves. They had exchanged insults for a full half hour while throwing pieces of chalk and other random objects at each other. He felt a bit better for it, but still ...

And now the ... the ... *Lothario* would be in Charms class.

Maybe Filius could hit him with something ... dark. Sort of by mistake.

And Filius was early, thank Merlin. It would give him a couple of minutes to collect himself before the rest of the class arrived.

Or not.

Because Scrimgeour and Pomona were already there, outside the classroom.

And Scrimgeour was accosting Pomona again! He was standing much too close to her, and sometimes Pomona was really too nice for her own good. Why she didn't just hex him into oblivion, Filius didn't understand.

"Let's pair up for Charms practice." Filius heard Scrimgeour say as he stepped even closer to Pomona. Scrimgeour looked ... what? Filius looked closer at him. The word 'hungry' floated through his mind, quickly followed by 'predatory'.

Hadn't he heard somewhere that Scrimgeour liked big game hunting? Wasn't his father even a well-known trophy hunter?

Pomona threw a searching glance around the corridor discovering Filius.

"I need a lot of help with Charms," said Pomona to Scrimgeour. "And Filius has already promised to help. He is very good at charms, don't you think?"

And you had to give it to him. Scrimgeour was fast on the uptake. He turned his head and looked at Filius ... and managed to smile. A crooked, tight-lipped smile that promised retribution.

Good.

Filius returned the smile, taking care to use his most cheerful one, just to be annoying. He was sick of Scrimgeour's superior attitude, so backing down wasn't an option anymore, and why in Hades should it be an option for him to start with?

"I'm sure Filius wouldn't mind if we worked together," said Scrimgeour, giving Filius a smile that was clearly meant to make him step down.

Oh, you had to love that kind of arrogance since it gave one such lovely opportunities.

"Of course we can work together, Scrimgeour, I talked to Irma the other day. And she did give me the impression that you need help with your charms. I'd be happy to give you a few pointers," said Filius, smiling his heart out while he spoke.

Scrimgeour's jaw dropped. It was a slow going path, and he managed to fish it up just before it hit his chest, but it was still one of the nicest displays of utter surprise Filius had ever witnessed.

"Well, I think Irma might have it wrong: I would have said that it was her ability as far as charms goes that is lacking," said Scrimgeour.

Filius' skin heated up, and for a moment, he thought his eye would indeed pop, and sometimes he hated how his mind worked because now he had the mental image of his eye hitting Scrimgeour in his forehead with a wet splat.

Scrimgeour smirked at him and the feelings intensified. Because, of course, he would say a horrible thing like that, using Filius' words against Irma. Not insulting Filius, but insulting her instead, who had done nothing but keep quiet, not wanting to hurt Minerva's feelings.

Filius pulled out his wand and spun it between his fingers. Nine inches long. Dragon heart-string. Oak, and very thin, which gave it a swishy quality.

Mr Ollivander had remarked upon it. According to him it was a well-balanced wand. Which was good, since he didn't feel very well balanced at the moment.

"You hunt big game, yes?" Filius asked.

It was odd, really, how relaxed he felt now. No unease any longer. It had its merit, coming to a decision.

Scrimgeour frowned, hesitated, but still answered the question.

"Yes. I hunt with my father and a couple of family friends."

And sounding proud of it too, the bloodthirsty brute.

"Do you ever hunt small game?"

"What would be the challenge in that?"

Filius watched the superior little smile Scrimgeour graced him with. It was going to feel so very nice removing it.

"I'm no hunter, but I would have thought that smaller prey would make a somewhat more challenging target. After all, hitting a Hippogriff with a spell, any spell, would be much akin to hitting a wall in this corridor. It would take no skill at all."

Scrimgeour's smile went away as he backed away from Filius. It was a good idea. It would give them some extra space for spell work. It was sad that Scrimgeour was such a dreadful arse, since he was, in fact, smart.

"The animals we hunt can defend themselves. It's what makes the hunt exciting."

Filius backed away, sensing, rather than seeing or feeling, Pomona backing with him.

"But hunting small ones, willing to defend themselves or even attack, would take more skill, wouldn't it? Take the wolverines as an example. They are well known for their ferocity and can bring down prey as large as a deer or even an elk. Alone."

"Do you actually have the gall to insinuate that big game hunters aren't skilled enough to manage small prey?"

Filius dropped the pretence of being amiable.

"I'm not insinuating," he answered.

Scrimgeour was fast on the uptake. He drew his wand and sent his first hex at Filius, almost surprising him. But only almost.

Thank Merlin that Pomona was the sensible sort: when Filius jumped aside, avoiding Scrimgeour's hex, Pomona disappeared into a niche of the corridor.

It was obvious, amusing even, to discover that his insult seemed to be close enough to the truth. Big game hunting hadn't done Scrimgeour's aim any favours at all, if this hex was anything to go by. Or he was too angry to aim well. Which was a good thing either way.

Filius bounced on the balls of his feet as he waited for the next attack.

And bless Scrimgeour's overheated Gryffindor temperament. Because of course it came, and of course it was delivered with such dramatic flair that the build-up could have been spotted from much, much, much further away than from where Filius was standing.

Time slowed down as it always did at those perfect moments when he knew, felt, that this was going to go down well. He saw Scrimgeour's lips moving, heard him begin pronouncing the spell, and there it was: Scrimgeour's point of no return, *the moment*, and Filius sent his own hex.

It was perfect, as he'd known it would be. Scrimgeour had no possibility to counter. No chance of defending himself. When the spell hit, the hit was clean.

And time sped up again.

Scrimgeour's expression of utter shock as the full body bind clipped him, locking his limbs together, was very satisfying. So was the fact that he started to sway where he stood and then keeled over. Like a big tree falling.

And for someone of Scrimgeour's height, it was a very long way down to the floor.

It would be unsporting to shout 'timber'.

Sadly.

It was just as well though, because the dull thud Scrimgeour made as he hit the floor wasn't at all as grand as Filius had hoped. Shouting 'timber' would have been over the top.

"What in the name of Merlin is going on here?"

And wasn't that the damndest piece of bad luck?

Why in Hades did it have to be Minerva and Irma catching him getting at Scrimgeour? He usually never did things like this. And Minerva was closing in on them with the speed of a kneazel protecting her kitten.

And after her came Irma with her eyes wide.

Minerva was the one who reached Scrimgeour first, and she did so before Filius had time to remove the spell.

"You put him in a full body bind? A body bind? That is just too infantile for words!"

Minerva drew her wand, waved it, released the bugger from the spell, grabbed hold of his hand and pulled him to his feet. Then she started to brush off the dust and dirt that had gotten stuck to his robe while on the floor.

"It worked really well, though," Filius said. "He went straight down."

Scrimgeour gave Filius a sour look while Minerva gave him a puzzled one.

"What happened?" asked Minerva.

Filius met Irma's gaze. She had come over to stand with him, a distance away from Minerva and Scrimgeour. She gave Filius a small shake of her head. She still didn't want him to involve her, then. And she was wrong about keeping quiet. Minerva would *want* to know. He was sure of that.

Well, almost sure.

"Pomona? Why were you ... never mind. Do you know anything about this?"

"Filius was being a gentleman." Pomona came out from the niche she'd been hiding in and went to stand next to him. "Filius isn't the kind of person who would use magic to hurt someone," said Pomona.

He was exactly that kind of person, but he wasn't going to tell Minerva that, especially since Irma was listening too.

"Filius and I were only messing about, and he got lucky. No harm done," Scrimgeour said. His whole demeanour was dismissive, nonchalant, shrugging the fight off as a being an effing nothing.

He had some nerve dismissing the whole debacle like this. Another good reason for wanting to see him hurt.

Filius should have used the hex that turned the victim inside-out.

Irma's hand was surprisingly strong as it grabbed hold of Filius' arm, stopping him from lifting his wand again.

Minerva watched them, eyes narrowed.

She was going to believe Scrimgeour's watered-down version despite Pomona's broad hint. He could feel it.

Then Minerva turned her head to Scrimgeour, and her eyes were just as narrow.

Filius' heart gave an extra beat. Maybe, just maybe, she wouldn't take his side.

"What happened?" she asked.

Scrimgeour opened his mouth to speak, but Pomona loudly, and very uncharacteristically, beat him to it.

"Rufus tried to kiss me when we went to Hogsmeade. I didn't want to. Filius happened upon us and helped. In the nicest way. Today Rufus caught up with me when I left the library, going to class. He wanted ... I don't know what he wanted but Filius came along again. Then they duelled. And Filius won."

Pomona gave him a rather brilliant smile. Which was nice of her.

"Minerva, she's been hounding me for months. You know that you and I are..."

"Two of a kind."

Irma finished the sentence together with Scrimgeour.

"What else did you say, Rufus? That you think she's the smartest girl in our year? Or maybe in all of Hogwarts? And the most handsome?" she continued.

Minerva paled at her words and, oh dear, the kneazel was truly out of the bag now.

"Rufus?" Minerva delivered his name like she would have delivered a stroke with a whip, and Rufus gave her an assessing glance in return. Then he arranged his features into a troubled frown.

The cold-hearted bastard was still convinced he would be able to get out of this in one piece then.

"Irma and I went out a couple of times. Didn't she tell you?"

The nerve of the man! The worrying thing was that Irma looked as if she wanted to jump him and bash him over the head with something heavy.

Minerva's bag came to mind. He was going to suggest it as an option if he could find a possible opening in the conversation. Or perhaps he could create an opening.

"Is that the truth?" Minerva's lower lip wobbled as she asked Irma the question. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know how. I didn't even know he had started seeing you instead of me. I thought we were still seeing each other. Then you told us..."

"The day you broke your inkwell."

Irma nodded.

Minerva moved away from Scrimgeour, ending up standing in front of him with Filius, Pomona, and Irma behind her.

"Let me recapitulate: You were seeing Irma. You lost interest, and without telling her, you started seeing me instead. Now, when we have been seeing each other for quite a few weeks, Filius discovers you at Hogsmeade trying to force..."

"Force?" Scrimgeour crossed his arms over his chest, looking petulant. "She wanted me to kiss her. I told you, she's been..."

"That is not true!" said Pomona, and Filius grabbed her arm and held on.

"Pomona is telling the truth," he said. "I heard them talking. She wanted to leave but he wouldn't let her. Then he grabbed her."

Minerva rolled her right shoulder. Worrying, since that was what she always did when they prepared to practice duelling.

"So, Filius, would you say that the description of the events I gave just now...before I was interrupted...was essentially a correct one?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I wanted to. We wanted to. We just didn't know how, and you seemed..." He interrupted himself just in time to swallow the word 'happy'. "I'm sorry, we should have. There's no excuse," he added instead.

"I'm sorry too," said Irma.

And that was when Scrimgeour yawned. He tried to contain it, or so it seemed, but the gesture as he covered his mouth with his hand was downright studied.

"So, if this little drama is settled," Scrimgeour said. "We should prepare for class."

It was pure luck that Filius was still close enough to be able to get hold of Pomona's arm again.

"I think there are a couple of more things that need settling," said Minerva.

"And they would be?"

"You, trying to kiss Pomona while still going out with me."

Scrimgeour had the gall to sigh.

Scrimgeour, the idiot, actually gave an explanation. And the worst one imaginable, to boot.

"I like taking walks down by the lake as much as the next man, but honestly, I don't walk with girls for the exercise. I view the walks more as an investment in the future. But if that investment doesn't pay off ... well, one needs to find a new prospect."

And that would be why he hadn't ended up in Slytherin: He lacked any sense of self-preservation, because, Merlin's balls on a stick ... or possibly Scrimgeour's, this was not going to end well.

Minerva was holding her bag of books in one hand and her wand in the other, and judging from the fact that both her arms were twitching, she was having trouble deciding which one she would use on Scrimgeour. Not that Filius cared, because Scrimgeour was going to get hurt either way. And that was a good thing.

Filius wasn't going to stand this close to her when she decided, though. He grabbed Pomona and Irma, dragging them along as he backed away from the coming carnage.

Minerva dropped her bag and lifted her wand.

Flick.

She wouldn't ...

Twist.

Nononono ...

"Remollazerti."

Stab.

Filius threw himself on Minerva's wand arm, managing to give it a push.

The spell poured from Minerva's wand anyway. A stream of electric blue left the tip of it, rolling like a wave towards Scrimgeour, hitting his right leg.

"You made me miss!" The sheer volume of Minerva's furious roar made Filius' ears ring.

"You didn't miss! And the counter-spell is flawed," Filius said. "Irma and I discovered a mistake in the calculations."

Minerva glanced at Irma. She looked sneaky. So did Irma.

"You knew?" asked Filius. He just couldn't believe those two sometimes.

Scrimgeour laughed. He should have no reason to laugh at all, but he did.

"Don't worry, Filius. As you can see I'm fine. Obviously the counter-spell wasn't the only thing you miscalculated."

In the circumstance it would be a very good thing indeed if the spell was flawed. But it shouldn't be. He had made those calculations himself.

Pomona took a step toward Scrimgeour. "You can't behave ... like that ... and ... and think you can get away with it."

Pomona's lower lip was wobbling, and her eyes were full of tears.

Scrimgeour laughed then, and Pomona ... The tears were going to start running any second now, and Filius had no idea what to do to make her feel better.

Then Scrimgeour, still laughing, lifted his hand and hit his thigh.

And the sound was all wrong. It wasn't a slapping sound. It was a splatting one. Like someone hitting the surface of a lake with a large flat object.

It stopped Scrimgeour from laughing at Pomona though.

It had actually stopped Scrimgeour from moving. And then Scrimgeour clenched his jaw, straightened, and tried to walk.

And that didn't work well at all.

He staggered, dragging his right leg along with him. The sound that emanated from the leg was something between a squelching and a clucking.

It was nauseating to listen to.

"Well, it seems to work," said Irma, her gaze glued to Scrimgeour's leg. "Even without tests."

Scrimgeour's eyes widened at her statement.

"What have you done?" he asked.

"Well," said Filius, since both Minerva and Irma seemed to have lost their ability to speak, "We've been working on a project, you see. A curse, or ... a hex. Whichever term you prefer. We planned on turning it in as an abstract for D.A.D.A. because we didn't want to try it out on animals. It liquefies muscle tissue, you see. And it seems to work well enough. Our theory was correct."

"You haven't used it before? And you said that the counter-spell is flawed?" He was roaring the words at Filius, and Irma chose to do what Pomona had done: she took cover behind Filius.

Scrimgeour turned his ire on Minerva.

"Fix it now!"

"You heard Filius. I can't. And I wouldn't even if I could."

"Fix it!"

"You should be grateful, really."

"Grateful? For what? Crippling me?"

"To Filius. If it weren't for him I wouldn't have missed."

"Missed? You hit me. My leg doesn't work!" Scrimgeour's roar made one of the suit of armours rattle.

"I didn't aim for your leg."

"What?"

"I didn't aim for your leg. I aimed further to the right."

For a couple of seconds Filius' brain went very still. Then it turned Minerva's words over a couple of times.

And then Filius gagged. And then he giggled, and then he gagged again. And giggled some more.

Then he laughed, because Scrimgeour keeled over when his useless leg gave way as he backed away from Minerva. Judging from his horrified expression, he was backing away from Minerva for the exact same reason Filius was laughing so hard. At least when he wasn't gagging at the thought of ...

He gagged again.

And that was the moment Filius realised that he had no idea how he was going to get them all out of this mess.

Part Four

"But of course Professor Balthazar would force us to transcribe his boring, pointless, useless research." Minerva said. Pomona gave her a forlorn nod as a response.

Filius agreed with her as far as the research went. But they had, after all, got away with, if not murder, at the very least maiming since it seemed doubtful that Scrimgeour's leg would ever be fully restored.

Irma gave Minerva and Pomona a surreptitious glance where they sat on the other side of the classroom and then leaned close to Filius. "And I think, all things considered, we got off easy," said she.

"Indeed. I'm sorry you and Pomona ended up in detention too, though," said Filius. "It should have been me and Minerva."

Irma looked at him and made a disgusted grimace. "Please. Rufus' father would have had Professor Balthazar's head if he hadn't punished everyone in sight. It's pure luck they haven't snapped our wands and sent us home." She paused and looked troubled. "They still might."

Filius glanced at Professor Balthazar. He'd been livid when he'd discovered what had happened. The usually so calm Professor Balthazar's cheeks had been red, spittle had been flying and a vein in his forehead had looked ready to pop. And Filius had wondered what would happen when that vein did pop...because for a horrid moment he'd been sure that it would, which, of course, had given Filius yet another mental image he had absolutely no interest in having.

Now the Professor was asleep, sitting at his desk. Filius assumed it was an after effect of being furious.

Filius took the opportunity at hand, reached into his bag and took out the gift he'd bought. And felt his heart speed up. Maybe this was stupid. Maybe she'd already bought a new one. Or she would hate it.

He swallowed hard and pushed the gift over to Irma.

"I bought this for you," he said.

Irma blinked a couple of times, looked at the present and then at Filius.

"You bought me a gift?"

"Open it. If you already have one I'll just take it myself."

He was an idiot, and she would hate it, and now his cheeks were heating, which meant he was blushing, and that was a bad thing.

Filius lowered his head over the paper and continued to write. A faint rustling sound told him that Irma was unwrapping the gift.

"Filius! It's lovely," Irma said.

He dared a glance at her and she looked pleased. Thankfully.

"You needed a new inkwell ... here," he said and handed her his quill. "Try it."

"But this ... it's too much." She received the quill almost absently, tried to dip it in the inkwell and the mother raven came to life, crowed and made an aggressive lunge for the shaft of the quill and decisively snapped it in two.

"Oh, Merlin!" Irma was startled enough to flinch and drop the remains of the quill. She gave him, a shocked look. "It's spelled to do that? What did I do wrong?"

Filius chuckled. He just couldn't help it. She looked adorable when frazzled.

"Nothing. It's just ... it isn't yours yet. You must buy or barter for it. Only its rightful owner can use it. I thought you might buy it from me. For a knut."

Irma gave him a look. And then she smiled. And a very enigmatic smile it was too. Not at all what he was used to seeing as far as Irma was concerned.

"But you said I could barter for it too," she said, after a long pause.

"Yes, but I thought that a knut was..." Filius was interrupted as Irma leaned toward him and kissed him on the cheek. Kissed ~~him~~ on the cheek. Filius felt his chest clench from the happiness of it.

"I...I think that was quite sufficient as far as bartering goes," he said when he managed to speak again.

Irma gave him another one of those smiles.

"Oh ... But that wasn't for the inkwell, Filius. That was for duelling Scrimgeour. *This* is for the new, excellent, inkwell."

And then she kissed him full on the mouth.