

You Make Me Believe In Magic

by Leandra

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's notes: A short, little fairy tale and a late response to the How Filch Got his Firepower Challenge posted on Potter Place. Many thanks to Lady Rhian for beta-ing this for me. She gave the story careful scrutiny, and it's much better for it. Mistakes are still mine, of course. And now...

Once upon a time ...

Argus Filch bent over slowly and reached for the wand lying on the stone floor. His back cracked audibly as he straightened, and he winced in pain. It was criminal really. Criminal how students treated something that was so precious so casually. The owner of this wand would soon face several hard detentions. The students thought he was mean-spirited and crabby, but they couldn't know how much it hurt him to see them take their magical gifts for granted.

This was the fifth misplaced wand he'd found this year. He held the wand gently, caressing its smooth wood like a lover. It was so beautiful. Vine wood and dragon heartstring. Just like the one he'd held oh-so-briefly in Ollivander's shop fifty years ago, before his dreams of a magical life had been crushed. Just like his mother's. And just like the wand wielded by the young witch who'd once given him fleeting glimpses of the life he might have had.

The castle's main door flew open, and Professor Snape stormed by him, his face set in the snarl that signaled great displeasure. But Argus was too engrossed in his own thoughts to pay him any mind. He was lost in remembrance of the few times he'd felt that tiny spark of power. Fleeting moments that brought surging hope when they began and left sinking despair in their wake. Each time, the power flowed through him for one exhilarating, illuminating second, but then quickly drained away. And now that she'd left Hogwarts, he wondered if he'd ever feel anything like it again.

Denied its privileges, he'd nonetheless spent his entire life analyzing the Wizarding world and studying its crafts. Had students or faculty bothered to inquire, they would have discovered that Argus Filch could recite letter perfect the entire Hogwarts' curriculum, from first-year Astronomy to seventh-year Transfiguration and everything in between. Hungering for knowledge and hoping against hope that one day he'd find a cure for his deficiency, he'd spent years spying on the students as they'd studied. He committed to memory everything from the wand movements for the flashiest charms to the smallest details of arcane herbal lore.

Potions had proved to be the most challenging subject to master. Students rarely brewed outside of class, and while he could repeat the instructions for hundreds of brews, he had no practical knowledge of the subject. So when young Hermione Granger set up a cauldron in the unused bathroom on the second floor, Argus chose not punish her. Instead, with stealth acquired from decades of stalking unsuspecting students, he followed her and her two sidekicks and hid himself in the adjacent cubical. That first

day proved to be frustrating; he could catch only glimpses of what she was doing as he peered furtively over the lavatory partition. But when she left her cauldron simmering over a waterproof fire above the bowl, he knew she would return. And so would he.

Peepholes drilled through the cubical promoted better viewing, and a quick raid of Snape's stores gave him the necessary ingredients for his own batch of Polyjuice Potion. This was something new and exciting...not only a potion not in the normal curriculum...but also the chance to observe practice of the craft. Day after uncomfortable day, Argus crouched atop his toilet and watched the young witch, mouthing the instructions as she spoke them aloud, and mimicking her stirring and chopping methods. Night after night, he repeated the process in his own quarters...but in the end it was to no avail. Oh, his potion looked like Polyjuice, thick and dark like lumpy mud, but it held none of the magic. Drinking it only gave him a stomachache. Humiliated and dejected, he threw his cauldron against the wall. What good was knowledge when you could not reap the benefits of it? He put away his books and resolved to be done with them. There was little profit in wishing for what you couldn't have. He was a worthless Squib, and that's all he would ever be.

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Argus trudged up the steps wearily: a bitter, lonely old man weighed down by his lot in life. Trelawney's loo was clogged again. The narcissistic witch would have to hibernate in the most remote of the castle's towers! *Inner Eye, my arse*, he thought. Didn't he have enough to do with that murdering Sirius Black on the loose?

As Argus reached the last turn of the spiral staircase, he saw a student scrambling down the silver ladder leading to Trelawney's warren. Hunched over her books, she barreled past him, and her swinging book bag slammed into his shoulder.

"Watch it there, young lady," he snapped. This one was more trouble than most of them; always trailing after those two miscreants, Potter and Weasley, she was. "A detention would go far to improve your manners, eh?"

The young witch whirled around and faced him, her wand clenched in her fist. Her brown eyes were filled with angry tears. "Fine!" she yelled, "Fine! This day couldn't get any worse; detention would only improve it."

Argus stood there mutely, stunned not by her disrespect but by the tingling sensation that was creeping through his body. It came from the invisible magic surrounding her, flowing out in waves from her. He could feel it. It was crystal clear and star hot, and it was the most beautiful thing he'd ever experienced. For a brief moment he *knew* he had magic: the power was within him.

Unaware of her effect on Hogwarts' caretaker, Hermione waved her hand impatiently. "Well, are you going to punish me or not?" She waited barely a moment before continuing. "I don't have time for this." She spun around, and in blur of brown and swirling robes, charged down the spiral staircase.

As Argus stared after her, he felt the magic drain away.

Mrs. Norris streaked after Hermione, but returned moments later to sit in front of her master with a puzzled look in her golden, lamp-like eyes. "Merrooww, merroww."

"What is it, my sweet?" He shook his head at her playfully when she cocked her head. "Now, don't mess me about, girl. She can't have just disappeared. You know you can't Apparate inside Hogwarts."

Trelawney's toilet troubles forgotten, he made his way back down the stairs, savoring the reality of finally knowing what it was to feel magic and resolving to discover how that girl had caused such a wondrous phenomenon to occur.

Over the remaining weeks of the spring term, Argus followed Hermione as she went about her business. She was not an easy mark to follow. She seemed to have no schedule, and sometimes he thought that Mrs. Norris was right to think that she vanished into thin air. But his patience was rewarded one day near the end of term. Standing just inside the Entrance Hall, he saw Hermione confront Draco Malfoy on the front steps. She was in a fine state, bristling with anger over young Malfoy's ridiculing of Hagrid. Argus crept closer and felt a prickling in his fingertips.

"Yes, yes," he whispered excitedly. He made no move to stop the altercation between the students. This was what he'd been waiting for.

"... pathetic," Argus heard Malfoy say. "And he's supposed to be our teacher?"

Suddenly, Hermione's hand shot up, and with a resounding, CRACK! she struck Malfoy across the cheek. Argus almost cried out as the prickling intensified painfully. His every nerve seemed to resonate with the witch's anger. But it was magic, and so he welcomed the pain. If only it would stay!

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It was during Hermione's fourth year that he became aware that another wizard was also watching her. At first, the malevolence in the dark wizard's face disturbed Argus. When he insulted the child's teeth and made her cry, Argus had to stop himself from protesting. He'd heard how she, Potter and Weasley had attacked Snape in the Shrieking Shack the year before, and evidently, the Potions master held a powerful grudge. But the anger Snape's taunt evoked from her brought Argus another taste of magic, and he began to feel a bit tenderly towards Hermione. He made a silent vow to shield her from the professor's ill will.

Hermione's entrance on the arm of Victor Krum at the Yule Ball brought Argus yet another surprise. She looked very pretty, and he felt a little bit like a proud papa watching his daughter bloom. As he held Mrs. Norris in his arms and swayed to the music under the glittering, enchanted ceiling, he watched Hermione whirl by with Krum, smiling and laughing. And then it began. Each time she circled near him, Argus felt that magic tingle in his fingertips. This time it came in a light, bright flood, with none of the pain he'd felt when she was in a rage.

"Enjoying the ball, Argus?"

"It is quite a sight, Headmaster. And no students misbehaving ...yet," Argus replied respectfully. Albus Dumbledore was the wizard he revered above all others. It was Professor Dumbledore who had found him in Diagon Alley: a scared and lonely fifteen year-old trying to make his own way after his father disowned him. He'd been standing outside the Leaky Cauldron, ready to leave the Wizarding World forever, when Professor Dumbledore told him there was place for him at Hogwarts. Dumbledore convinced Headmaster Dippet to hire Argus as the caretaker's assistant. Hogwarts had been his home ever since.

Hermione and Krum passed by again, and Albus noticed the hungry expression that suffused Argus's face. "You seem quite interested in our Durmstrang champion ... and his charming companion," he said, his tone mildly rebuking.

"It's nothing like that, Headmaster!" Argus exclaimed, scandalized. He quickly explained his situation. "It's like nothing I've ever known. That feeling you get when you knock your elbow...that's what it feels like...but all over."

"Miss Granger," Albus mused, "wields a vine wood and dragon heartstring wand, I believe. The same as your mother's. And the same as the one Ollivander thought most compatible for you?"

Argus nodded, and Albus stroked his long beard thoughtfully. "Remarkable. Interesting. She is a talented young witch. And there is affinity of Magicks there too. Perhaps when she matures ..." He smiled suddenly, a mischievous glint in his blue eyes. "It might be best if you keep an eye on her at that, Argus. She does seem to be garnering quite a bit of masculine attention this evening."

His eyes swept from the attentive look on her partner's face to the disgruntled scowl on Ronald Weasley's face, and then to the angry one on Igor Karkaroff's face, before finally resting on the gaunt face of his Potions master. For a moment, Snape seemed unconsciously wistful as he watched the Bulgarian Quidditch star wrap a possessive arm around the pretty witch.

Argus looked to see what had caught the headmaster's attention and sighed. He'd not seen that look on Severus Snape's face since he was a teenager. He'd always had a

soft spot for that boy, an outcast, just like him.

"Do not give up hope, Argus," Albus said gently. "There is much good to be found, even in these troubled times."

Across the room, Snape grimaced in evident self-disgust, spun around quickly, and stalked out into the rose garden. As Durmstrang's Headmaster followed him, Albus shook his head. "Troubled times, indeed."

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Throughout her fifth year, Argus continued to follow Hermione whenever he could. Each time he found her in an angry mood...which happened quite often in those days...he would feel a jolt of magic flow through him. But it never lingered for long, and he sometimes wondered bitterly if he wouldn't have been better off if he'd never felt it at all.

He was extremely busy, though, and didn't have too much time to brood. At the headmaster's request, he befriended Dolores Umbridge and kept him informed of her activities. He knew that the students thought he was a horrible man, but after seeing what Umbridge did to Potter's hand, he also knew they were better off in detention with him than with her. After all, he only *threatened* dire punishments; he never actually imposed them.

In the staff room on the day Dumbledore was removed from Hogwarts, Argus noticed that Professor Snape's attitude towards Hermione seemed to have softened. In hushed tones, Minerva bragged to Filius about Hermione's prowess with the Protean Charm and the clever jinx that kept Marietta Edgecombe from speaking about the activities of Dumbledore's Army. Argus saw that there was grudging admiration in the Professor's eyes, although his words were typically harsh.

"Silly girl," he hissed at Minerva. "Doesn't she know that drawing attention to herself at this time is dangerous? And you are encouraging her? Potter is going to get her killed."

Snape kept almost as close an eye on Hermione as Argus did after that. Argus never saw anything untoward in his manner, but he could tell that Snape was beginning to care for the young witch. Mind you, he wasn't sure that Snape himself was aware of it, but it was quite clear from his frantic mutterings as he and Argus unsuccessfully searched the Forbidden Forest for the missing students later that year that Snape's focus was mostly on finding Hermione.

"Foolish child ..." he complained bitterly. "How can I protect her if Potter ... arrogant, hopeless ... cannot even block a simple thought ... too damn clever for her own good ... if she dies ..."

Argus knew that he would never forget the stricken look on Snape's face when Hermione was carried into the infirmary that night. Poppy had asked for his assistance to diagnose the curse afflicting her, and the guilt that lined his face as he told Poppy the cause and the cure was terrible to behold. When Poppy inquired if he was certain, Snape's expression turned stony.

"Of course I am certain; I taught Dolohov that curse," he ground out harshly. With a last look at the unconscious witch, Snape fled the infirmary, and worked like a madman to brew the potions needed to offset the damage done by the potent spell.

In Hermione's sixth year, Argus had many opportunities to feel the prickling of magic when he was near her. It seemed that she spent much of that year irate and frustrated. But when Severus Snape killed Albus Dumbledore, Argus discovered something: while Hermione's anger and happiness each crackled with magical energy, her grief held no magical charge whatsoever.

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BANG!

Argus was jolted out of his reminiscences as the castle's main door again flew open and slammed against the wall. He felt his nerve endings sizzle even before he recognized the witch charging through the door.

"Where are you?" she screeched. "Severus Snape, you can't just Disapparate away when I'm talking to you."

Argus stared at Hermione Granger. She was extremely angry, and her magic reached out to him again. He welcomed it like a long-lost friend. The wand he held seemed to quiver expectantly in his hand.

"Have you seen him?" Hermione demanded, turning to face him with her hands planted firmly on her hips. "Where did he go?"

Argus wordlessly pointed down the corridor leading to the dungeons. As she hurried away, he followed her. It was clear there was an argument brewing, and he might as well benefit from her ire. Fortunately, this was a Hogsmeade weekend, and only first and second year students remained in the castle...none inclined to linger near the Potions classroom.

Creeping behind Hermione, Argus was again drawn into reflection. It had been more than five years since Albus Dumbledore's death; four since Harry Potter had destroyed all of Voldemort's Horcruxes and finally defeated He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. At what mercifully became the final skirmish, Severus Snape had ripped off his Death Eater's mask and left his master's side to fight with the Order of the Phoenix. During the course of events, he'd been hit with a curse and had fallen at Hermione Granger's feet. Some said he took the curse for her, others claimed it was coincidence. In any event, the unconscious wizard was easily captured by Aurors at the battle's end. Argus heard later that only Hermione's intervention kept Potter from killing Snape right there and then as he lay unmoving on the ground.

Snape's fate at the hands of the Ministry was predictable. Minerva McGonagall remained comatose from injuries suffered on the battlefield and was unable to testify to Snape's continuing role as spy for the Order. In spite of Hermione's impassioned testimony that he'd saved her life and how that should surely count for something, Snape was sentenced to life in Azkaban.

Snape himself had not said one word during his trial. He sat stoically, seemingly unaware of the chains binding him tightly to his chair, while his unkempt hair fell forward in a greasy mass to hide his expression. When he did raise his head, it was to look through the assembled crowd with a faint sneer on his lips. The picture in the *Daily Prophet* showed a thin, sunken face, its prominent nose topped by burning, dark eyes. Snape's never-handsome profile was marred even further by the jagged gash of an unhealed curse scar on his right cheek; Argus assumed it was from the curse he'd taken for Hermione. Argus could not hold that printed gaze for long...there was too much emotion, too much turmoil hidden behind it.

When Minerva McGonagall regained consciousness three days later, her first words had been, "Where's Severus? I must clear Severus." Her desperate pleas to the Ministry to release Snape fell on deaf ears.

"Really doesn't matter what else he did," one Wizengamot member stated vehemently and publicly to anyone who would listen. "Snape killed Albus Dumbledore, and there isn't any justification for it. That bastard will rot in Azkaban until hell freezes over. If we still had the Dementors, he'd be first in line for the Kiss."

It was a popular sentiment.

Then a miracle happened. Albus Dumbledore's ghost appeared at the Ministry, demanding that the Wizengamot free Snape. He'd apologized for showing up late; it seemed he'd been lying low in remote part of Hogwarts and lost track of time. Dumbledore was not subtle in his campaign. He popped unannounced into the Ministry and disrupted high-level meetings. He followed Wizengamot members as they shopped in Diagon Alley, while they ate dinner with their families, and even when they visited the lavatory, where his running commentary scarred many a wizard for life. Some began muttering that Albus-bloody-Dumbledore was a worse menace than You-Know-Who had ever been. It took six months, but the Minister of Magic finally yielded to Dumbledore's unrelenting demands. After all, a ghost needs no sleep, but Ministers do.

The *Prophet* ran another picture of Snape leaving the Ministry on the day he was pardoned after his final appearance before the Wizengamot. They hadn't even cleaned him up before releasing him, Argus remembered resentfully. Snape's hair had been filthy, his face bruised and cut, and his robes torn. Argus was appalled that the Ministry treated any wizard so disrespectfully. It just wasn't right. In that same picture, sending identically fierce glares towards the camera, Minerva and Hermione flanked Snape, though his picture-image never once acknowledged their presence. The *Prophet* noted Harry Potter's conspicuous absence from the hearing.

Months later, a small article at the back of the newspaper announced Severus Snape's reinstatement as Potions master at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Still later, a gossip columnist remarked on Snape's attendance at the New Year's Day wedding of Harry Potter and Ginevra Weasley and made coy references to a midnight kiss between Snape and Potter's friend Hermione Granger, speculating about ulterior motives and secret relationships.

Judging by Hermione's actions in the last few minutes, Argus suspected that there might have been something to that.

Hermione reached Snape's office and began to pound on the door. "I know you're in there, Severus," she yelled. "Don't make me come in after you!"

There was silence from the other side of the door. Argus felt the witch's anger build, and with it his empathetic resonance to her magic. When she raised her wand and blasted the door's lock, Argus grimaced in pain. That jolt of magic was a little too strong.

Behind the ruined door, Severus Snape faced Hermione, his own features contorted in anger. "We have said all that needs to be said, Miss Granger. Your presence is not welcome."

"Don't start with me, Severus. I haven't been "Miss Granger" to you for some time. I asked you a question..."

"And my answer was no, was it not?"

Hermione tossed her head, and crossed her arms over her chest. "Your answer was to vanish without saying anything, and you know it." Her anger seemed to leave her, and her voice took on a pleading note. "We belong together. You've dried my tears and warmed my bed. You saved my life, Severus. Why won't you let me share it with you?"

His hand reached up involuntarily to touch the scar on his cheek. "I do not need your Gryffindor gratitude, Miss Granger. To be truthful, I find it quite galling." He stared at her coldly.

"It's Hermione, Severus, and yes, you saved my life, and yes, at first what I felt was gratitude. How could I feel anything more when I'd hated you for so long? But then, then ..." Her voice grew husky and her eyes softened. "Then, when we talked, when I realized all that you'd done for us, when I discovered how clever you are, how much you cared ... then ... then I fell in love with you."

"How maudlin, Miss Granger. Do you require a tonic?" Severus asked, sneering down at her.

Hiding behind a coat of armor in the hallway, Argus shook his head. Stupid wizard. Didn't he know what he was turning away? He listened closely as Hermione continued.

"Don't mock me, Severus. Call me "Miss Granger" one more time and I'll hex you. I'm not a fluffy little girl, and while you may once have called yourself Prince, I am well aware that you're not all that charming. You're bad-tempered and irritable. You're frequently thoughtless and cruel, and you wear that scowl like a talisman. Your hair should be declared a disaster area, and your teeth need a good dentist. You are obstinate and ornery. But you're also damned intelligent, loyal, and intensely passionate. And the scar on your face bothers me not one whit...it's a badge of honor. It's not gratitude. I love you, Severus, and I want to share my life with you."

"You forgot to mention that I'm convicted murderer," Severus said sarcastically. After an involuntary shift in her direction, Argus saw that he now held himself stiff and straight. "Surely a somewhat larger obstacle than those you have so eloquently described."

"You've been pardoned," Hermione said impatiently. "And under the Wizarding Council edict of 1603, a pardoned wizard has rights and privileges the same as any other. It's written in the code..."

"And that, my dear, is irrelevant. No law, no decree will change the facts. I am the Death Eater who killed Albus Dumbledore, and I always shall be. I am a pariah. It is one of your greatest flaws is that you look to books for answers when they have none to give. As is your habit of thinking that every problem can be solved. Grow up, Miss Granger."

Hermione's wand flashed, and Argus held back a startled chuckle at the sight of Severus Snape sporting a head of flaming red hair.

"Hermione!" Snape snarled. "How dare you!"

"I warned you, Severus," she replied evenly. "We've been through too much together for you to dismiss me like this. I love you."

Severus flicked his own wand and restored his hair to its natural color. He looked down at her as she stared back defiantly. Argus heard the weariness in Snape's voice as he said, "I never expected it to last, Hermione. You think you love me, but one day you'll find someone who can truly give you all you deserve."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I thought we were finished with that. I get to decide what I want, and I want you." She paused and Argus could see her shoulders slump. "But maybe you don't want me. I know I'm not the most desirable witch, Severus."

"Do you?" he replied, his voice suddenly gentle. He reached out and held her chin in his hand so that she had no choice but to look at him.

"I agree that your hair is even more of a mess than mine...I find strands of it everywhere from my nose to my navel. And your voice is penetratingly shrill when you are cross...which is frequently. You are overbearing, heedless and headstrong, and have no sense of self-preservation. You excuse everyone but yourself for their human failings." He paused and then focused on Hermione's lips, which had begun to quiver slightly. "You are also intelligent and insightful. You are bossy, stubbornly loyal, stimulating, and beautiful in your own way ... totally enchanting..."

Severus clamped his mouth shut. It was clear he had not meant to say that, even if it was true.

Hermione laughed shakily and smiled softly. "And that, Severus, is why I love you." She straightened to her full height and looked him straight in the eyes as she said, "I love you, Severus, not because you saved my life, not because I think you need saving. You know me...not as Harry Potter's friend, not as the Gryffindor brain or the war heroine...you know *me*, and you still care. I love you, Severus, because you love me. The rest doesn't matter. Please," she pleaded, "give us a chance."

Hermione stared up Severus, searching for some sign that she'd gotten through to him. When he remained silent, her chin dropped and her shoulders slumped. Wordlessly, she turned to leave his office.

Hidden behind the armor, Argus willed Severus Snape to come to his senses and follow her. Don't let her go, you foolish boy, he thought.

And it seemed that his silent plea was heard, for Hermione had taken no more than two steps when Severus lunged after her, grabbed her almost violently by the elbow, and spun her into his arms. For a timeless moment, his eyes held hers, and then he reached out to cup her face in his hands and bent his head to take her lips in a fervent kiss. His fingers pushed into her hair. In turn, Hermione clutched at his shoulders as if she'd never let him go.

Argus turned to go, embarrassed to be privy to such a private moment. But then he felt it...that warm tingle he'd found only in Hermione's presence. It was the warm, bright glow that he'd first experienced at the Yule Ball. But this feeling was more intense, more potent than any he'd felt before. He turned around slowly, moving forward to step towards the invisible filaments of magic emanating from the joyful witch. The first tendril reached his outstretched left hand, and others soon followed, converging on him like metal filings seeking a magnet. The magical energy traveled swiftly up his arm, branching at the shoulder to spread throughout his torso and his legs. He could feel it

humming and vibrating in every fiber of his being. Then, with speed and intensity that was excruciating, the magic raced down his right arm, pooling in the hand that still held the vine wood wand. Argus felt the shaft grow warm against his palm. He waved the wand, and to his astonishment, red and gold sparks flew from its tip.

Steadying his shaking, wrinkled hand, he pointed the wand at a stray feather littering the floor. His heart pounded loudly as he whispered, "*Wingardium Leviosa!*"

At first he thought nothing had happened. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, the feather rose a few scant inches from the floor. Hardly daring to believe, he lifted the wand and watched as the feather followed its tip. He drew loops and swirls in the air, and the feather tracked along faithfully. Argus was loathe to end the spell...what if this was temporary? What if the magic left him forever? Could he bear yet one more disappointment? Gathering his courage, he uttered the words to end the spell. "*Finite Incantatem.*"

He felt the magic subside, and the loss was heartwrenching. It had gone, just as it had done many times before. But wait...was it possible that there was something left? He concentrated on the sensations he was feeling. His body thrummed gently with a soft, barely noticeable reverberation. Was the magical power still there? Maybe the impossible really had happened. Argus closed his eyes and focused. Once again, the wand in his hand grew warm. "*Lumos!*"

The glow of the lit wand shone through his eyelids, and he lifted them slowly. With mounting glee, he cried out, "*Nox! ... Lumos! ... Nox! ... Lumos! ... Nox! ... Lumos!*As he watched his wand flicker between dark and bright, the wonder of it all overcame him, and tears slipped down his cheeks.

Severus closed his broken office door. He and Hermione were so engrossed in each other that they never saw the elderly wizard. Only the ghost of Hogwarts' former headmaster saw Argus Filch clutch the precious wand to his chest and sink to the stone floor of the castle that had long been both his haven and his prison. Unbeknownst to Hermione and Severus, theirs were not the only dreams to come true at Hogwarts that day.

The Wizarding world marveled that so old a Squib as Argus Filch could suddenly gain magical power. Healers, Diviners, and Rita Skeeter debated the issue for years to come. Some suspected Dark Magic. Some claimed a physic shock unblocked a curse that hitherto bound Filch's powers. Unspeakable Luna Lovegood swore that Filch's cure could only have come from the sting of a Blibbering Humdinger. Argus himself cared naught for their speculation, for he knew the truth. He knew that he was the unexpected beneficiary of the most Ancient Magic of all: the power of love.

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Epilogue

Hermione Snape put down her tea and cast the *Prophet* aside. There'd been no mention of the Snapes that day. The publicity that had hounded them since word of their engagement graced the front page appeared to have died down. It seemed they'd become old news while honeymooning in the south of France, a blessing for which Hermione was immensely grateful.

Severus sorted through the owl post that had accumulated in their absence. Hermione gazed at him fondly, thinking that this was all so comfortingly domestic. Her new husband was still too thin, but the lines on his face had relaxed a bit. Two weeks of sun and lovemaking had been good for him...good for her too, she admitted with a happy grin.

"What's that?" she asked curiously, watching Severus poke at a large, brown-paper wrapped package with his wand.

Severus merely grunted absently and continued his examination. The box seemed to be jinx and hex free, but you never could tell. Cautiously, he opened the envelope affixed to the top. While he read the note, Hermione reached for the box. With a quick flick of her wand, the paper fell away, and the sides flopped open. "How beautiful!"

Severus looked up from the scrawled note, and his expression softened. Hermione's hair was balled into an elastic at the back of her head, and there was a spot of jam clinging just above her lip. *She* was beautiful, and she was his. He was a little bit afraid of the happiness that bubbled up inside him; it still seemed unnatural. "There you go again," he chided her. "That could well have been dangerous."

"I haven't touched it," she protested. She Levitated the object and turned it slowly in the air, examining it from all sides. "It looks like it's made of vine wood," she said.

It was a marvelous creation, the wood tightly coiled and twisted into a wide shallow bowl. The inner surface had been melded into a smooth, unbroken and highly polished surface; a feat Hermione guessed would require careful magical manipulation. But the outside of the bowl was intricately hand-carved. Looking more closely, Hermione saw that the carving depicted a dragon. The tip of his tail rested at the base, his body and wings climbed the spiral, and his head lay along the rim.

"Who sent it?" she asked.

"Argus Filch," Severus replied, his voice puzzled. "He says it's a wedding present."

"Filch? Why would he send us such a marvelous gift? He's hardly even spoken to me since my first year at Hogwarts."

Now that he'd determined it was probably harmless, Severus plucked the bowl from the air and admired it. He handed the note to Hermione and leaned over to kiss her, swiping the jam away with his tongue. "I have no idea. He merely wishes us well. Perhaps you can satisfy your curiosity when I return to Hogwarts next week."

"I would like to talk to him." Hermione mused. "It's hard to believe he finally found his magical power so late in life. It might be an interesting story."

Finis

Author's notes: Many thanks to Wartcap and Potter Place for posting this challenge. I didn't meet the deadline for the challenge, but I had lots of fun writing this little tale. It will serve as a companion piece to a story I plan to begin posting in a few weeks, tentatively and unimaginatively titled *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. So, if you are interested in finding out what brought Hermione and Snape together (this time)...not to mention how Snape came to be a guest at Harry's wedding...stay tuned.

PS For those who think that the Wizarding world would never allow Severus to return to Hogwarts to teach, more on that in the next story. Until then, I offer up Igor Karkaroff, known Death Eater, and Headmaster of Durmstrang. Throw in Quirrell and Lockhart, add in Umbridge, and Binns and Trelawney, perhaps, and the Wizarding world's concern for their children's education seems a bit off kilter.