

The Language of Flowers

by juniperus

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Neville Longbottom speaks them.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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The Battle of Hogwarts: Retrospectives to Mark the Fifth Anniversary, a Compendium

By H.J. Granger-Weasley

Section III, *Aftermath*; Chapter IV: Neville Longbottom

We worked throughout the summer after the great battle setting the grounds around the castle aright, repairing the walls and the massive doors, strengthening and re-weaving the wards. This work began even before the bodies of the brave fallen were claimed, mourned, and laid to rest; it began even as the slain Death Eaters were identified and carted off by the Aurors.

I was there. I first helped in the Great Hall as family members streamed in and cried out in shock and grief, answering questions by those who had not returned to Hogwarts that year about those of us who had. I worked with other Gryffindors to repair the damaged portions of our common room and dormitories, and then our team was split and our ranks enlarged by members of the other houses as we made our way through those other common rooms, and later classrooms, to erase the havoc wreaked by the Carrows. The work was difficult enough to keep my mind off my own sorrow and confusion but yet not so difficult that it taxed my depleted energy.

Many of those helping at the end of spring were no longer present at the end of the summer the Aurors and other officials returned to the Ministry, the older students eventually returned to their homes to join the younger students sent away that day in May, and the families of the fallen who had taken some comfort in helping during the initial assessment of the devastation eventually left to continue living. That left those of us who had not yet made that choice, the choice to continue living, and what remained of Hogwarts' staff. Our group was small: Morag MacDougal from Ravenclaw, Susan Bones from Hufflepuff, and Harry Potter and I from Gryffindor; Hermione Granger returned from Australia in July after having restored her parents' memories. We would be joined by a few other seventh years returning in September to either follow a modified and accelerated curriculum to prepare for the special NEWT testing the Ministry would offer us in December or stay the year as a special eighth year class and test in the spring.

Harry and I spent a lot of time talking, and comfortably not talking, about the ones who were gone and what they meant to us. Morag and Susan stopped spending time with us, apart from meals (complaining that we were "too depressing"), but neither then nor now did I consider our introspection depressing. No, I took comfort in it, and in the quiet that would settle on Harry and I in the middle of laughing about Fred or reminiscing about Remus' teaching, that said more than our words ever would. After Hermione returned we talked about the newly-announced plans for a memorial by the Ministry that would be installed in the atrium right next to the (third!) Fountain of Magical Brethren actually, Harry railed against the ministry, Hermione against the fountain and hubris of the wizarding world, and I listened. And nodded.

I nodded because they were right, of course: the Ministry was a self-serving machine that, despite claims to the contrary, still held to the notion of pureblood and wizard supremacy and did and would attempt to take as much undeserved credit as possible for the end of Voldemort's reign. They would laud who they chose, and conveniently ignore who they did not this is what sent Harry to ranting, as none of the owls he sent to Minister of Magic Shacklebolt demanding Professor Snape be included with the

other fallen heroes had been answered. This was when the plan was hatched, as they say, when Hermione (in a fit of exasperation at Harry's third explosion of temper at breakfast) told him that he was daft for expecting the Ministry to 'do the right thing.'

Harry looked up from his half-eaten plate of eggs and bangers and stared her in the face. "When you want something done right, you have to do it yourself, isn't that right, Neville?" he said as he whipped his head in my direction. "And we're just the Gryffindors to do it!"

I admit I was speechless, not that I ever have many words at my disposal, and simply stared at Harry. Then at Hermione as she gaped at him, smiled, and started clapping and bouncing in her seat. "Brilliant, Harry!" she squealed.

Although we had been friends since our first year, I wasn't a member of the Golden Trio and I didn't know firsthand that they were practiced at getting around reason and obstacles. I started to ask, "B-but *how*, Harry? Memorials cost a lot of Galleons, and we have to find a location, and..." but he cut me off almost immediately.

"Here, Neville, on the grounds where it *should* be. I'll provide the financial backing to start, Hermione will organize a fundraiser or three, and I'll ask Dean Thomas to help with the design you know how artistic he is." Harry paused. "And you, Neville, will be in charge of the planting arrangement around the base."

I was shocked. "Me?!"

"Of course," he said as he gestured wildly with his fork. "You know the language of flowers better than anyone else I know, Neville!"

And so it was that over the course of the next several months we planned. Harry talked representatives from the other houses into joining his 'committee': Morag was joined by Anthony Goldstein, Hannah Abbott and Ernie Macmillan sat alongside Susan, and Tracey Davis, a solitary returning half-blood from Slytherin, volunteered as soon as she caught wind of our plans. Headmistress McGonagall authorized a location, the top of one of the hills overlooking the loch, almost immediately and expressed her pride in the inter-house unity, drive, and caring displayed by our rag-tag little group. I know Harry and Dean have both written on the subject of the memorial, and I couldn't do that justice anyway, so on to the flora.

It's what I know better than anyone else, after all.

There is a language to flowers, to plants. They are vitally important in potions, of course, and one may open any page of *Wortcunning for Potente Potions* to learn their many uses and methods of preparation. More than that, however, they speak of meaning, of myth, and of symbols for those traits and emotions we tie to our activities, our relationships, our memories. This memorial was for all of the fallen, many of whom I knew very well and held their memories dear, and this task was more important than anything I had ever done (even killing Nagini) so I worked with clarity and sincerity. Each face, each name etched in stone that I traced over and over with the tip of my finger, floated before me as I walked the grounds, worried the winds, took the counsel of the soil, and drew up the plan.

Sweet basil for friendship and agrimony for thankfulness. And camellia for gratitude and rue for grief.

For Fred Weasley, half of the brilliant duo who always made us laugh and whom I always respected for not making me the cruel butt of the joke, I planted heliotrope for loyalty and phlox for his sweet dreams while he waits patiently for George to join him. For my former professor, Remus Lupin, whom I respected more than I can say, I chose bee balm for compassion and dill for his fortitude in the adversity of his affliction, and many bright colors of forget-me-not (like the ever-changing hues of her hair) to represent his all-too-short marriage to Nymphadora Tonks and their love for each other. For Tonks' sorrow I planted hyacinth and hops, injustice, to represent their loss to their orphaned son. Colin Creevey, my friend and housemate, is a loss I felt all too acutely. For him I planted bushes of white lilac arcing behind the memorial for his youthfulness, for his innocence, that would grow tall and wide as the years passed. So many others' names are etched in that stone, and I planted coriander for merit and sage for wisdom, fennel for strength and snowdrop for hope, thyme for courage and violet for loyalty.

The last name on the memorial, the name that drove Harry forward so unwaveringly and that was the very reason for the existence of our *Hogwarts'* memorial was the most difficult of the many heroes. Severus Snape was surely a hero, but how could I give true and lasting tribute for so complex a figure, someone for whom my own feelings were so complicated? While I had never liked the man, and he certainly had never liked me, I always had respect for his intellect and his power, for his skill with potions and, as the rest of the story was later brought to bear, for his personal bravery and depth of devotion. Oh, but how to represent the puzzles and conundrums; the hot and cold running intensity of my former professor and headmaster, former Death Eater and spy for the light, fierce (if not pleasant) protector of every child ever under his care?

As you visit the memorial you will see the lilacs and the planting bed before the stone base that stretches out in a curve, a wave of riotous color and textures like the personalities of those memorialized, like their traits and the emotions we experience when we remember them as vital and living parts of our lives.

But Severus Snape wasn't a man of riotous color. He was a sentinel tall and proud and never-wavering.

It is for him, you see, that the small grove of trees creeping up the hillside behind the memorial, ever-flanking the marble monument (with its cacophony of sight and scent and meaning and the wide bench sitting before it for quiet contemplation) and yet *apart*, stand in unspoken witness.

Present there is oak, and ash, and (haw)thorn to represent one of Britain's most intelligent, brave, and powerful wizards: *Of all the trees that grow so fair, old England to adorn/Greater are none beneath the sun than Oak, and Ash, and Thorn.* Box elder for his stoicism sits next to cedar for his strength. Interspersed among these are trees upon which, only at the shameless height of spring, you can see the oft-hidden sum of his worth: blossoms of magnolia for perseverance and peach for the captive heart, cherry for the steadfastness of his indomitable spirit and apple for better things to come.

And the soft green carpet beneath them is rosemary. For remembrance.

2003, Neville Longbottom

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[for photographs and layout map of memorial site complete with plant identification please see appendix B]