

Tomorrow's Appeal

by Celisnebula

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

Prologue

Chapter 1 of 12

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

Prologue

Friday, May 10th

Josie Longbottom watched as her daughter climbed into bed, clutching a tattered teddy bear. She bent down to place a kiss on her daughter Alice's forehead, smoothing back the unruly bangs that kept obscuring her dainty face.

"Mummy, when will Daddy be home?"

"I'm not sure, Precious," she replied, sitting on the corner of Alice's bed. "You must remember, he is away doing important work."

"Saving the rainforest," the child said sagely.

"Yes, Love, saving the rainforest. He'll be home before you realize it."

"But, Mummy, I miss him so."

"I know you do. I miss him too. You know what? I bet he misses us just as much." She pulled her daughter into a hug. "I've got an idea; why don't you draw him a picture, something that shows what we are doing while waiting for him to return, and I will post it to him. That way, when he misses us he will have a picture of us."

"Oh, Mummy, that is brilliant!"

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**Wednesday, May 22nd**

Josie was in the middle of her first cup of morning coffee, flipping through the channels on the television when an owl arrived. No matter how often Neville said that owl post was normal, she just couldn't get into it; cell phones and computers were vastly more practical for instant communication. However, there were times when magical means were far superior to the non-magical, or rather Muggle, means.

Even after eight years of marriage, and a magical child, Josie had to sometimes pinch herself. The whole concept was just unreal. Yet, it was an integral part of her husband and daughter's life. Sometimes she felt like a stranger in a strange land, for not only was she one of the few non-magical people in her circle of friends, she was

also the only American. Still, no matter how advanced the magical community might be in some situations, there were just some things she refused to live without electricity, a telephone, and television being the primary items, though a good old fashioned root beer float often preempted all three.

The owl fluttered its dark brown wings and thrust forward a leg, piercing her with what Josie assumed was a contemptuous look.

"Yes, yes," she muttered, reaching towards the extending leg, "I know you want me to get that thing off you."

"I find any droppings," she threatened, fumbling to get the letter off its leg, "and I don't care how useful you are, you'll be supper."

The owl ruffled its feathers, narrowly missing her hand with its beak.

"Hey now, no cause for that," Josie exclaimed. "I suppose you want a treat before you leave too." She eyed the bird warily, tossing it a piece of toast from the counter. "Well, all I have is toast at the moment, so you'll have to be happy with it." The owl caught the toast, and ruffled its feathers one last time before hopping out the window.

She picked up her coffee mug and moved from the counter to the kitchen table, rubbing the parchment between her fingers as she went. She wondered who would be sending her an owl post. Neville, though he sometimes had difficulty with technology, used the cell phone she bought him more and more. The reception was spotty at times, especially considering he was half a world away, but it enabled them to hear each other's voices. So the letter couldn't possibly be from him.

Neville's family had practically disowned him when they married in America; even the birth of Alice couldn't shake them from the contempt they seemed to hold Josie in, so it was doubtful they would be writing to her. Apparently the pure-bred lot couldn't stomach the fact that she was a Muggle; the fact that she was an American to boot only drove the wedge in deeper.

Josie took a long drink of coffee, fingering the letter thoughtfully. Various scenarios filled her head, but she dismissed them all. Alice was too young for a Hogwarts letter, she hadn't started the advertisement for a wizarding elementary school for those children whose parents couldn't afford private tutors -- though wizarding families were loath to hire a Muggle, even if she was married to a "war hero," -- and all of the friends she and Neville shared would Floo over instead of sending an owl.

With a sigh, she opened it, knowing that she'd drive herself mad with possibilities if she didn't.

Josie never felt the scalding coffee splashing against her skin as the mug dropped to the ground and shattered; never felt the shards of glass piercing her palm as she collapsed on the ground in a heap of shock.

*Ethan Russo*

*Machiguenza Research Corporation*

*Av. Paseo de la Republica 10*

*Lima 1, Peru*

*Mrs. Neville Longbottom*

*Rose Cottage*

*12 Salisbury Road*

*Abbotts Ann, Andover*

*England SP11 7NX*

*United Kingdom*

*Mrs. Neville Longbottom,*

*It is with deep regret that I inform you that your husband, Neville Fredrick Longbottom, was killed in an unfortunate accident while scouting an uncharted area of the Amazon Basin, near the border of Peru.*

*Your husband died with valor, madam, selflessly risking his own life in the defense of an unarmed man as we were attacked by a Peruvian Vipertooth Dragon. It was an unfortunate and unforeseeable accident, considering that the Peruvian Vipertooth is often found in the mountainous regions of Peru and not the lower Amazonian Basin.*

*His entire service with Machiguenza Research Corporation has been one of honor and dedication. His death will leave a void.*

*I was privileged to call your husband a friend, madam; he was what more men should endeavor to be. My sympathies are with you, and your family, though I know these words are a cold comfort. Mere words seem futile at this time; they cannot convey the anguish I know this letter brings, nor can it convey how much your husband will be missed by those of us who were fortunate enough to call him friend.*

*Respectfully Yours,*

*Ethan Russo*

*Lead Researcher*

*Machiguenza Research Corporation*

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Thursday, May 30th

It rained the day of Neville's funeral, dark rolling clouds and sweeping wind that seemed to be nature's response to Josie's anguished soul. Beside her, little Alice clutched at her hand, as if she were afraid that Josie, too, might disappear.

Though Josie hadn't told her what had happened, Alice knew. In the week that followed, Alice hadn't said a word; however, she refused to let Josie out of her sight, even at night. Alice would wrap her thin, trembling body around Josie and refused to go to sleep unless Josie promised to stay. It was easier to agree than to argue, especially since Josie wasn't all that keen to let Alice out of her sight.

The last week had gone in a blur of tears. There were so many arrangements that needed to be done, people to contact, and of course, Neville's body to be transported.

Josie hadn't really believed him dead until she saw his lifeless corpse. It was an irrational hope that perhaps they had made a mistake, one she clung to even when she got the voice mail every time she dialed his cell phone. That hope was quashed when his body arrived, ready for the memorial ceremony.

Neville's grandmother had wanted a traditional wizarding pyre, and Josie agreed, wanting to make peace with the woman who seemed such a shadow of her former self. Much to Josie's surprise, the ceremony seemed to be like any other memorial service, filled with loving friends and family to commemorate Neville.

Josie was so lost among the sea of faces paying respect to Neville that they all seemed to just blur together. Had it not been for the Weasleys and Hermione Granger, Josie would have gone mad. Molly Weasley, being a practical woman, held most condolence wishers at bay, knowing Josie was in no shape to deal with their sympathetic kindness.

Josie's eyes misted as she watched her husband's dear friend make his way through the throng of people. Alice burrowed herself into Josie's side, her tear-stained face pressing against her breast. She ran a soothing hand down her daughter's hair, wishing she could do more to ease Alice's aching heart.

Ron stood up before the crowd, pushing his long shaggy red hair behind an ear as he surveyed the faces before him. His soft voice was captivating as he started the eulogy.

"I think Neville would be surprised if he saw so many people gathered here to mourn him. He was, after all, a quiet man. He liked the solitude of his greenhouse. He liked to be one with nature, helping various plants take that step from seedling to glorious green. It wouldn't occur to him that he was so popular; that he would, and will, be missed so much. Yet, the very fact that so many have gathered to celebrate his life says so much more about him, and his kindness, more than mere words can describe.

Neville did many of his good deeds by stealth. He never advertised the fact that he helped so many people with the research and plant conservation he was doing. He never talked about his numerous acts of kindness, yet I believe almost everyone here today has been on the receiving end of that kindness. Neville was the type who would do anything for a friend in need; the type of man you want at your back when things go south. He was the type of man whose quiet words of appreciation meant more than the blusterous congratulations that many give, simply because you knew that they were heartfelt.

He loved children and they loved him. This shy man had no trouble conversing with a four year old; it was the adults who often stumped him. Yet, children loved him, and children are the best judges of character. Children might not be able to put names on words like honor and decency, but they understand kindness, and they can detect the truth; they knew that Neville was a good man.

Now, there are some who would accuse Neville of being too plodding and too conservative. He wasn't one to take overt chances or make quick decisions. Neville liked to weigh everything up carefully. However, once he gave his commitment, he gave it wholeheartedly. One of the most wonderful things about Neville was you also knew exactly where you stood with him.

Today, many people mourn him; though I dare say his wife Josie and daughter Alice will miss him most of all. I hope, however, that they will take comfort in the fact that so many others will miss him as well, for many different reasons. While I am sure his family was aware how well respected he was, it must be gratifying to know how many others will genuinely miss Neville.

I will miss him greatly because friends like Neville don't happen often in a lifetime. We have been friends since our days at Hogwarts together, and while we went on to seek very different professions, our friendship maintained. Our friendship even survived his dating my sister, Ginny. Actually, he was more than a friend, he was a part of my family. When he married Josie in America, she too became apart of my family, and I was honored to be named Alice's godfather when she arrived nearly a year later.

I know how much Neville adored his daughter, and it is such terrible pity that he will not have the chance to see her grow up. I think the day Alice was born was one of the happiest of his life. He was so nervous, but I knew how wonderful he would be. Unfortunately, there are a great many things Neville will never get to do, and the horrible fact is, we have to still do them, without him.

So I will say goodbye my friend. The world has lost a vital part of itself with your passing. We will hold you in our hearts and our memories."

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A/N:

*Litigation Disclaimer*

*None of the characters are mine, and neither are some portions of the plot, which were influenced by the movie The Ghost and Mrs. Muir. I will brush them off and put them away nicely when I am done playing with them.*

Peruvian Vipertooth Dragon per Harry Potter Lexicon.

The Eulogy is pieces of different speeches given to love ones lost this last year.

Calendar dates are for the year 2013, if anyone is interested.

Machiguenza: An Ethnobotanical Study of Eastern Peru

Essentially, I have warped the very real Dr. Ethan Russo, a premiere neurological researcher studying various botanical species in Eastern Peru, near the Amazon Basin, to serve my purposes.

<http://manu.montana.com/>

## Chapter 1

*Chapter 2 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**Monday, June 3rd**

## Hermione Granger's Office

Josie shifted in her seat, crossing her legs as she watched the brown-haired woman seated at the desk look over the documents she had brought. This was the last place she wanted to be, begging for help from a friend because she didn't understand the intricacies of the wizarding world, but the owl on Friday, after Neville's funeral, had caught her off guard.

"Hermione, can they get away with this?" Her voice sounded rusty and disused to her own ears.

"Neville's family is citing a few antiquated magical hereditary and matrimonial laws," Hermione sighed, sitting back in her chair. "Unfortunately, the law regarding the legitimacy of your marriage is one that hasn't been overwritten or repealed, though it is rarely used these days."

"So they can just claim that Neville and I weren't married, and take everything, including Alice, away from me?" Josie asked, twisting her purse strap around her fingers in a nervous gesture.

"Technically, no, at least I don't think so." With an irritated flick of the hand, Hermione pushed a wayward strand of hair behind her right ear. "You and Neville were married in America." She paused for a moment, flipping through the packet of papers Josie had brought. "The marriage is valid in America, witnessed and sealed by the American Magical Consulate, and as such should be just as valid here in the United Kingdom."

"Why do I think I hear a 'but' coming, Hermione?"

"Because they've basically tied our hands," she stated tiredly. "You will be entitled to those assets which you and Neville held jointly, such as his Gringotts account, and his pension from Machinguenza Research Corporation, since he has you down as his primary beneficiary. Anything else, however, will be held in probate until a hearing can be held to determine the legitimacy of the Longbottoms' claim."

"What about Alice? They want to take her away from me; they've cited some bullshit about my not being a fit parent to a wizarding child because I'm a Muggle." There was a bit of a panicky edge to Josie's voice as she asked, "Can they do that?"

"Honestly, I don't think they can. Again, though, I am not one hundred percent sure. As I said before, they are citing quite a few archaic hereditary laws. I think the majority of them were repealed sometime in the last two centuries when an egalitarian Ministry tried to retain the rights of Muggle parents who, by some quirk of genetics, produced a wizarding child." She paused, pulling out a pen to write down some notes. "Give me a day or two for research and I'll have most of the answers to what they can and cannot do regarding Alice. If the issue of Alice's guardianship does go before the Wizengamot court, Alice will still reside with you, at least until they deliver a judgment."

"Just so we are on clear terms," she said, jumping to her feet. "I am not giving up my child!" Josie paced across the office floor, moving to the window. It was bright outside, entirely too sunny for her peace of mind. She turned from the window to face Hermione's desk, resting her hip against the wall. "I will do whatever is necessary to keep her with me."

"I doubt it will get that far, Josie," Hermione declared, looking up from the papers to catch Josie's eye. "Honestly, the magical community might be a bit antediluvian in some cases, but they're not completely unreasonable or unsympathetic. I seriously doubt they would take away your child; you are an exemplary mother who does everything to promote the wizarding culture for her child, despite a Muggle heritage. Besides, these days, there are more and more Muggle-born wizards and witches that still reside with their Muggle parents, parents who have no idea about the wizarding world and how a child should get on in it." She stopped and reshuffled through the papers on her desk again. "Getting back to assets, I need a list of everything you and Neville held jointly. While, technically, you are entitled to anything that also has your name on it, a full listing of those properties would be a good faith effort before the court."

"Oh god," Josie moaned. "That means we'll lose Rose Cottage. It was Neville's parents' house. His and his grandmother's are the only names on the mortgage deed. Does this mean we'll have to leave?"

"Regrettably, yes," Hermione replied, rubbing the bridge of her nose.

"What am I going to do?"

"Well," Hermione started, placing both hands on the desk in front of her, "I need to know if you applied for a United Kingdom Visa. Did you follow the basic immigration procedures, or did you just fill out the Ministry paperwork allowing you to reside here?"

"I thought all magical communities had open borders," Josie muttered.

"Yes, while the magical communities have open borders, the countries which host our communities often don't."

"I filled out the Ministry's required paperwork; they assured me I didn't have to fill out any other paperwork since I was married to a British citizen. Should I have filled something else out? What will this mean?"

Hermione sighed. "You should have filled out a Wife Visa, followed twelve months later by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). Since you didn't fill out those forms, it means that you can only live and work in a magical community such as Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade. Where we'll run into trouble is if you try to live or work in a non-magical community."

"So the only way Alice or I can stay here in England is if we continue to live in one of the magical pockets?"

"And work, I'm afraid. You can only work within the magical borders; you will not be able to gain employment out in the Muggle world."

"So basically, I'm screwed."

"I wouldn't go that far, Josie," Hermione chastised. "You might not be able to stay in Rose Cottage, but ... I think another alternative might be found."

"I'll not take charity, Hermione," Josie shot out, sagging against the wall. "And I doubt what little Neville and I have in our Gringotts account will cover renting another space."

"It's not charity to take help from friends, Josie; and besides, if what I have in mind is available... well, let's just say I don't think you'd need to worry about the cost of rent."

"How long have we got?" Josie asked, wearily. The weight of the situation seemed to press her into the ground.

"You've been given until the end of the week to get your personal belongings from the cottage and other accommodations sorted."

"This is all so frustrating!" Josie bit out, her fingers gripping the edge of the windowsill, as she glared off into space. "I can't believe they would do this to us." She sighed once more; her eyes caught Hermione's as she leaned into the wall for support. "Will it take you long to sort out other arrangements for us?"

"I should have an answer by Wednesday, at the latest." She walked around the desk to the window where Josie stood. "If, by some chance, this plan doesn't work out, I have one or two other suggestions."

"I don't know what I'd do without all your help right now, Hermione," Josie said through the clog in her throat, wondering how she was going to survive this, on top of everything else.

"Josie, that's what friends are for." Hermione grabbed her hand. "Besides, you are in no shape to be dealing with these things on your own. Just have a little faith, things

will work out."

"I still, it seems so much, Hermione," she said, giving Hermione's hand a squeeze. "Thank you."

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Tuesday, June 4th

Rose Cottage

"Mummy, are we really gonna hafta move?" Alice whispered, curling into Josie's side.

"Ah, Baby," Josie sighed out, "I'm afraid we do."

"But why?"

Josie twisted her body and pulled Alice into her embrace, resting her chin on the top of Alice's head as she tried to come up with an appropriate response.

"Because it makes me sad to stay here right now. I loved your daddy very much, and living here just makes me miss him more; it makes me so very sad to be here when he isn't."

"It makes me sad that daddy isn't here too," Alice mumbled into Josie's shirt.

"I know, Baby," Josie murmured, placing a kiss on the crown of her head.

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## **Wednesday, June 5th**

### *Rose Cottage*

Josie was in the kitchen packing up the cupboards for the impending move when Hermione's head popped up in the fireplace.

"Is it all right if I come over?" Hermione asked.

"The more the merrier," Josie called over her shoulder.

"I've spoken with my contact," Hermione said as she burst through the fireplace in a swirl of green.

"Your contact?" Josie asked, raising an eyebrow. "What, you're not allowed to say his name?"

Hermione laughed, "Yes, I err well, technically, no; this person doesn't want to be revealed to the public at all. As I was saying, I've spoken with my contact, and he has agreed to let you the space. It will require some work, no one's lived in the cottage for nearly ten years, but he is willing to let you stay in the place for a nominal fee. "

"Nominal fee, huh? Just how nominal?"

"Basically, you stay, supervise the workers he'll be sending to make the place habitable, pay a small maintenance fee of five hundred Galleons per annum, and he's willing to call it good. He's even agreed to set up Muggle conveniences such as electricity and phone lines, under his own name, so that you needn't completely rely on magical means."

"Five hundred Galleons a year?" Josie asked, narrowing her eyes at Hermione. "What is this place? A hovel?"

"No, it's decidedly not a hovel," Hermione replied, with a slight blush. "It's just been hard for the landlord to rent the house out."

"Why?"

"Thehouseish haunted," she sputtered out, so quickly Josie was sure she hadn't heard her right.

"What was that? I didn't quite hear you."

"I said," started Hermione, enunciating every word clearly this time, "that the house is haunted."

"Haunted? Piffle," Josie laughed. "Like there's really such a thing as haunted houses."

"Actually, Josie," Hermione said, unsmiling, "there are haunted houses. Ghosts are a part of the wizarding world. I was even taught by one at Hogwarts."

"Just where are you planning on putting her, Hermione Granger?" asked Molly Weasley, striding into the kitchen.

"Molly, I didn't know you were here," Hermione squeaked out in a surprised tone, turning toward the older woman.

"I'm just here helping Josie get sorted. I offered to let her move into the Burrow, but she's a stubborn one." Molly looked over at Josie. "Calls it charity, she does," she said with a small sniff. "Helping family is not charity."

"Molly..." Josie warned, not wanting to get into another argument with the stubborn woman over her choice.

"Yes, yes, I know." Molly waved a hand, signifying that it didn't matter. "You want to be self-sufficient." She turned to Hermione, "So, just where are you planning on sending my girls?"

"Craig Mhor cottage."

"You're sending them to Craig Mhor? How did " Molly broke off.

"You know of the place?" Josie asked, intrigued. "Do you know the owner?"

"Yes, I know the place." Molly pierced Hermione with a hard look. "It's a dear little cottage, just a few miles outside of Hogsmeade."

"And is it truly haunted?"

"Well now, I've heard stories, but whether or not they are true remains to be seen. I know some who've claimed to have been thrown out by the ghost of the last owner, and some who've claimed they enjoyed a lovely weekend there, a time or two."

"Hogsmeade, you say? Hermione, won't that mean there's too much magical interference for most of my electronic things?"

"No, not really. It's far enough away that the magical energy shouldn't cause too much havoc, yet still within the magical pocket surrounding the village, so you'll have access to the best of both worlds. Plus, about 30 miles to the east, there is a smaller Muggle city, Bonar Bridge, so it's not like you'll be totally cut off."

"Why do I feel as if I'm not hearing everything?"

"Because you're a suspicious soul?" Hermione quipped.

"It's a place to stay," Molly piped in, "and if things don't work out there, you always have a place with us."

"Molly," Josie heaved, "as much as I love you, I dearly hope I never have to move in with you. We'd only end up fighting."

"If you say so, dear," chuckled the older woman.

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A/N:

Disclaimer: The characters from the HP universe are not mine, I've only borrowed them for a bit to play with. I promise, I shan't hurt them too much, and will faithfully clean them up when I am done. However, Josie and Alice are mine -- so I take full blame for all their human frailties.

I have to thank Rachel W who has graciously offered to beta for this story, the poor girl has no clue what she's getting into (as I massacre the English language), I also have to thank Alan and Mark, the lovely Yorkshire lads who are my Brit betas, ensuring that there isn't too many glaring Americanisms throughout. All fubar portions are solely my own... I'm an addled brain idiot sometimes, so feel free to point them out if you see them and I will fixed

Long winded explanations so unless you really want to know how I have come up with some of the things laid out in this chapter, you might want to skip.

Bonar Bridge is an actual place; I had lunch with my son there when we drove down from Wick to Inverness in August of 2003.

For those of you who wonder why I don't send Josie running back to the States with Alice, I must put forth The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and the International Child Abduction Remedies Act (ICARA). It is an agreement between various countries, most notably the United States and the United Kingdom, which deals specifically with the issue of custodial issues. If the Wizengamot court were to decide to give custody over to the Longbottoms and Josie were to flee with Alice, and if the American government were to find them, they would be under this law's dictates. I think that this would one Muggle law that the Wizarding Community would adopt as well, considering that child custody is such an important matter.

I admit I am playing with the immigration laws.

As far as I am aware, I could be wrong, but if a British Citizen marries a foreign national outside of the UK, upon entering the UK that spouse must fill out a wife visa with an immigration stamp, which entitles her to reside within the UK's borders for 12 months. After that initial 12 months, the spouse must then apply for an Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) to remain indefinitely.

What I don't know is what happens to said spouse if the British Citizen dies. I am not sure if they can remain in the UK, or if they are required to return to their country if they have not applied for British Citizenship themselves. So, I am taking artistic license.

Small history lesson and how I am warping it to suite my needs:

Women and their children under Roman and English common law were the sole property of their husband. Wives could not own property, could not enter into contracts, and could not have access to their children unless their husband allowed them to. <http://www.law.georgetown.edu/gh/spiro.htm>

Two different sites on how property was dispersed to inheritors, according to lines of succession for the peerage.

<http://www.genfiles.com/legal/primogeniture.htm>

<http://www.heraldica.org/faqs/britfaq.html#p3-5>

Where I am coming from:

1) I would hazard a guess that secret loving purebloods of the past would have done anything to keep their lines untainted, hence I bet, there would be some antiquated governing laws that would make it nearly impossible for wizard or a witch to marry a Muggle. It would almost be a concubine sort of situation, where a Muggle could be a concubine, and produce valid heirs, but could not legally be a wife, or have any of the inalienable (often limited) rights of a wife/widow.

~~~It would be something that, as time went by, was more often than not, just not paid attention to, and Muggle/Wizard intermarriages would act like normal marriages. Unless, of course, a pureblood family member, following a loved ones death, tried to reassert the ancient law to ensure that they inherited.

2) Because of the tenets of point one, the child would be in the sole custody of the pureblood family, and not the Muggle parent's custody, because the said child would be the wizarding heir.

Gee, aren't you glad you read all this?

## Chapter 2

*Chapter 3 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**Wednesday, June 5th**

*The Burrow*

"All right, Hermione," Molly said as the young woman emerged out of her fireplace, "I think you better be telling me just what's going on before Josie and Alice arrive."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't play coy with me, Missy," Molly huffed, waving a spoon in her direction. "I'm giving you the benefit of the doubt here. Since when have you leave to rent out Craig Mhor?"

"There isn't much to tell." She moved around and snagged a warm roll from the counter beside Molly. "I wrote to him, apprising him of the situation, and he offered. You know how he is about these things."

"Get out of that," Molly snapped, slapping at her hand with the spoon. "I swear you're getting to be as bad as Ron." Hermione grinned cheekily at Molly as she plopped a bite into her mouth. "Is he coming home then?" she asked, pushing the butter toward Hermione.

"No," Hermione sighed, leaning against the counter, "he's not coming home just yet."

"Do you really think it's wise to send Josie to Craig Mhor?"

"What do you suggest we do then? You two have already argued over her moving in here with you, and I doubt she'd take kindly to moving in with me, or anyone else for that matter. The cottage is available, and despite its unpleasant residential annoyance, is probably the best spot for her and Alice."

"Yes, well," Molly sniffed, "I still can't believe Augusta Longbottom is doing this, and to her own great-grandchild."

Hermione shrugged. "You know how Neville's gran can be."

"Still, it isn't right, what she and that lot of hers are doing. It isn't right at all."

"Yes, well, I don't think they'll get far," Hermione replied, breaking off another piece of the roll. "Everything I've looked at, so far, suggests that Alice is entitled to Neville's assets as his heir. So, while they're making it hard on Josie at the moment, Alice will get everything they're trying to deny them once she gains majority."

"That's all well and good then, but what about now, when Josie and Alice need those assets?" Molly asked, her tone conveying her contempt for the Longbottom's actions toward the girls. "What about the cottage? Will Alice and Josie be able to return to Rose Cottage?"

"I don't think so. Technically the cottage wasn't Neville's; apparently his gran let them live there, even though she disapproved of Josie."

"Thus, they have no choice but to make a go of it at Craig Mhor," Molly stated flatly. "Have you told her yet?"

"No," Hermione sighed, pushing off from the counter, "not yet. I'll talk to her once she's settled." She reached around Molly's ample frame and snagged another roll. "Speaking of settled, would you mind helping me tomorrow at Craig Mhor? I need to make sure the Muggle confusion and repel charms are down. It would be horrible if we set Josie up in the cottage only to have her get lost the first time she went out into the yard."

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### **Wednesday, June 5th**

#### *Rose Cottage*

"I don't wanna," cried Alice, her face red and blotchy with tears. "You can't make me!"

"Alice Claire Longbottom, when I ask you to do something, I expect you to do it."

"I don't wanna move. I wanna stay here," Alice screamed. "You can't make me go!"

"Alice, stop it," Josie said in a stern voice.

"You can't make me," Alice howled, flinging herself onto the floor. She kicked and writhed against it, all the while screaming, "You can't."

A flower vase flew off the bookshelf and crashed to the floor, the books lining the bookshelf began to whip across the room, where they smacked into the wall only to fall the floor. Alice screamed until her voice began to get hoarse, kicking at the floor as tears of rage rolled down her face.

Josie pulled Alice onto her lap, curling a leg around Alice's flaying legs and wrapping her arm around Alice's body. "I know, Baby, I know," she muttered in a calm voice, rocking her body back and forth. The furniture rattled against the floor, thumping and scraping as it shook in place.

Alice shuddered, her muscles tensing and twitching as Josie held on. "It's scary to be this out of control," she whispered against Alice's ear. Water drops began to fall all around the room, as Josie held on to her daughter.

"I'm going to help you gain control," Josie said soothingly into her hair, over and over again, as she rocked Alice. "I'm going to hold you until you get back into control."

"I don't wanna," Alice gasped out. "Please, Mummy, don't make me."

"I'm sorry, Alice," Josie murmured. "We don't have a choice. We can't stay here."

"But – but, Daddy," Alice wailed. "We'll forget Daddy if we go."

"Ah, Honey, you will never forget your Daddy," Josie assured the trembling girl. "He's always here." She placed her hand over Alice's heart.

"But – what if I forget?" Alice whimpered. "What if I can't remember him?"

"You won't forget," whispered Josie. "I won't let you forget."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

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### **Wednesday, June 5th**

#### *Hermione Granger's Flat*

"Bloody hell, Hermione, there's an owl at the window," came a sleepy, gruff voice, followed by a sharp jab of an elbow. "Get out of bed, you lazy slag, and get it."

"S sleeping..." she mumbled, rolling over and pulling the covers over her head.

"Hermione," the voice grunted, as the owner pushed her out of bed. "You've an owl."

She landed with an undignified thump, sprawled out in a mess of blankets. "Eh? What?" she uttered unintelligibly.

"Owl," came the muffled reply.

"Oh, right. Owl," she muttered in a sleepy voice, pulling herself up of the floor. She crossed to the window and pushed it open.

"You've got a rotten sense of timing," she wheezed at the bird, as it stuck out its leg. "I'd have thought by now you'd've developed enough manners to nip your owner if he did something like this at this time of night."

"Go on," she shooed the bird once the message was off. "I've nothing for you, not at this time of night." The owl ruffled its feathers and gave a reprimanding hoot before taking flight.

*Hermione,*

*Will be sending workers to the cottage at the end of week. Make sure he doesn't scare them off before Josie moves in. She should be fine in the house as long as they avoid the cellar. He doesn't manifest unless someone touches the items down there.*

She threw the note on the nightstand and climbed back into bed.

"Was that...?" asked her bedmate.

"No, it wasn't."

"It sure looked like it was his owl..."

"It wasn't," she yawned, rolling on to her side.

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A/N:

The annoyance of a temper tantrum, parents know these symptoms well, err most of the symptoms, minus the flying and shaking items. I have to thank Rachel W for her search and destroy methods on my grammar foibles, and Mark for giving it a once over to make sure I've not been too American with everything. Any and all fubar portions are my own.

## Chapter 3

*Chapter 4 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**Thursday, June 6th**

*Craig Mhor*

"This isn't exactly what I envisioned when you proposed this..." Josie waved her arm at the building in front of them, "place."

"Why? What's wrong with it?"

"It's so... well... huge. When you said it was a cottage, I pictured something... cottage-like. This is not cottage-like. It's humungous. It's nearing castle proportions. There's no way Alice and I could live in something like this."

"It's wonderful, Mummy," Alice whispered in an awed voice.

"Trust me," Hermione laughed, "this is no castle."

"It's not funny, Hermione. I can't even begin to imagine the sort of upkeep this place might take."

"Good thing you're not responsible for its upkeep, then."

"I'm so glad you find this amusing."

"I honestly don't know what the problem is, Josie. So it's a little bigger than you anticipated. That doesn't change the fact that you need a place to move into."

"Mummy, can we go inside?" Alice asked, tugging on Josie's hand. "Please?"

"You've got to admit, it is overwhelming," Josie threw over her shoulder at Hermione as she followed Alice.

Alice let go of her hand and sprinted forward, her pigtails flying in the wind as she raced.

"Alice," Josie called out, "slow down a minute! Wait for us to catch up, please."

"It's not going to be that bad, Josie. Just don't use the extra rooms. No one said you had to live in every part of the cottage... In fact, it might be better if you didn't poke around in some of the rooms."

"Are you on that whole ghost bit again?"



"Josie, I'm serious. You really shouldn't mock the idea."

"All right, all right..." Josie laughed, doubling over. "I concede... You believe there's a ghost; who am I to gainsay? For all I know, those strange bumps in the night that have millions of 'normal' people startled are wizarding ghosts."

"We'll see how flippant you are when you're face to face with the resident ghost," Hermione huffed. "Just don't expect me to Floo over if he scares the shite out of you."

"Gee, no running to the rescue? What sort of heroine are you?"

"The living sort," replied Hermione glibly.

"Mummy, Aunt Hermione, hurry up!" Alice shouted out impatiently.

"We're com " Josie started to reply, but her words were cut off as she smacked into a Muggle Repellent Charm. She grunted in pain, the wind knocked out of her as she fell backwards on her ass.

"Fuck," whispered Hermione, "I thought we got all of them." She turned to help Josie up. "Are you okay?"

"Mummy," Alice shouted, "are you all right? What did you trip on?"

"I'm okay," she shouted out to Alice, taking Hermione's proffered hand. "What was that?"

"It was one of the Muggle Repellent Charms," Hermione grunted as she pulled Josie to her feet. "I thought Molly and I had gotten them all this morning. Normally, instead of tipping you on your arse, it makes a Muggle suddenly remember an important appointment, and the Muggle scurries off, afraid that they're late for it."

"Lovely."

"Here, hold on a second and I'll have it gone in a jiffy." Hermione drew out her wand and muttered an incantation. "There now, shouldn't have any other problems."

"Famous last words," Josie muttered, rubbing her sore ass.

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#### **Thursday, June 6th**

##### *The Burrow*

"You should have seen her, Molly, knocked on her arse, sprawled out on the ground grunting. I swear I've never seen anything funnier."

"Hardy har har," muttered Josie.

"Oh, come on, Josie," laughed Hermione. "You have to admit it was funny."

"About as funny as the door handle biting your hand was."

"Hey now, that wasn't funny. I need my hand."

"And I don't need my ass? I'm just not sure this is going to work," sighed out Josie. "Between the Doxy infestation throughout the house, the charmed doorknobs that bite, and the various Muggle Repelling Charms... it's a nightmare."

"Now, Josie," began Molly, "I doubt it's a nightmare. It just needs some work."

"Work?" Josie squeaked. "Have you seen this place yet? It's a monstrosity!"

"Oh, Lord, here we go again." Hermione reached across the table for the open bottle of wine. "I told you already, Josie, it's not that big." She waved the bottle after pouring some into her glass. "Top off, anyone?" Both Molly and Josie raised their glasses for a refill.

"Besides, the owner has workers coming out to the house tomorrow, so the Doxy infestation should be wiped out by the end of the day. I'll let the crew know about the charmed door handles, and I'm sure we'll be able to pick up any other nasty surprises," Hermione said, setting the bottle down.

"Oh, yeah," Josie retorted sarcastically, "that will really help if all the traps and charms are attuned to Muggles. You all will walk right on by them with hardly a blip, I get there, and wham, I'll get smacked with something nasty."

"She does have a point, Hermione," Molly interjected. "You'd feel terrible if something happened to either of them because of a missed spell, and there are times when certain things only react to, no offense dear, Muggles and not wizards."

"And it's not like I can just twinkle my nose and 'poof' it's gone."

"Samantha Stephens you're not," giggled Hermione.

"Samantha who?"

"Sorry, Molly, it's a Muggle thing... My Mum was a closet Bewitched fan, and Samantha Stephens was the name of a character on television show who was a witch. She could just wiggle her nose, and poof, she was able to do magic."

"Wandless magic? She must have been powerful."

"No, no, Molly, it was all make-believe," Josie assured the woman. "The actress wasn't a witch at all; it was just an entertainment thing."

"I have an idea," Hermione blurted out. "It's not a great idea, but it's one that'll work for now. Give me a day to owl the owner, and... mmm... see if he'll agree. If he does, then," she hiccupped. "Oh, excuse me. Where was I? Oh, yes. Let me owl the owner, and then if it's okay "

"I'm beginning to think your ideas are totally rubbish, Hermione Granger," Josie snorted, bringing the glass of wine to her mouth.

"Rubbish? It's not rubbish, daft bint." She arched back in her chair, puffing out her chest. "I'll have you know " Her chair toppled over, taking her with it. Josie spewed out a mouthful of wine out as she laughed at Hermione's predicament.

"I think you girls have had more than enough." Molly rose from her chair and held out a hand to help Hermione off the floor.

"I fell..." mumbled Hermione, scrambling up from the floor with Molly's assistance. "I can't believe I fell." She reached for the half-full glass of wine on the table in front of her.

"Serves you right," sniggered Josie. "Call me a daft bint, will you?"

"Enough. I'm sending you both home. Hermione, take the Floo, as you're in no condition to Apparate; and Josie, leave Alice here for the night; she's all snuggled in Ginny's old room," Molly ordered, pulling the wine glass out of Hermione's reach.

"Shouldn't I take her home?"

"Not while you're in this state. Let her stay; you know how she loves being here."

"I think we're in trouble," Hermione tried to whisper to Josie as Molly ushered them towards the fireplace.

"S your fault, yanno," Josie snickered, "karmic balance for laughing at me when I fell on my ass."

"Off with you two," Molly interrupted their soused musings. "We've a lot of work to do at Rose Cottage tomorrow, so I want you both to head straight to bed."

"Yes, Mummy," giggled Hermione as she stepped into the Floo. The flame turned emerald as she swirled away. Molly threw more Floo powder into the fire and called out: "Rose Cottage."

"Night, Molly," Josie whispered, giving the older woman a quick peck on the cheek before stepping into the green flames.

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A/N:

As always, thanks to Mark for pin-pointing my abundant Americanisms, and to Rachel W for catching my massacre of the English language.

The Bewitched thing... I couldn't resist. I have to thank everyone over at the [hp\\_britglish livejournal](http://hp_britglish.livejournal.com) who kindly answered my question over whether this would be something Hermione might or might not be exposed to.

[http://www.livejournal.com/community/hp\\_britglish/122207.html](http://www.livejournal.com/community/hp_britglish/122207.html)

Muggle Repelling Charms are canon, if anyone is interested. There are, apparently, a wide variety of them, including the ones use to hide Hogwarts from Muggles so they do not see anything but the ruins of a castle. There was also one used at the Quidditch World Cup Stadium that, when a Muggle got anywhere near it, caused them to suddenly remember an appointment, or something else, they were late for, and hurry off. Apparently the charm that hides Hogwarts works because most Muggles do not believe in magic; however, there is indication that the charms to protect the wizarding world do not always work take Diagon Alley for example.

As detailed in the Harry Potter Lexicon:

· Muggles have no magical power at all, but this does not prevent them from seeing magical things altogether. Without being given direction about magical things, however, their eyes tend to simply miss them.

o Muggles just don't notice the Leaky Cauldron - their eyes seem to slide from the shop on one side to the shop on the other side without seeing the pub in between.

o Muggles' minds can be influenced so they see, for example, a sign saying "danger keep out" and a ruin when they look at Hogwarts.

· If directed, however, Muggles can see magical things. Hermione's parents apparently saw the Leaky Cauldron because they entered Diagon Alley, but this was undoubtedly only when shown the way.

<http://www.hp-lexicon.org/wizworld/blood-status-names.html>

## Chapter 4

*Chapter 5 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

### Friday, June 7th

#### *Hermione Granger's Flat*

The alarm went off with a high-pitched shrill, startling the lone occupant of the bed. She rolled over, the flat of her palm slapping against the top of the clock as she stuffed a pillow over her head. Hermione was just on the verge of falling back asleep when a loud tapping rapped at her window. She pulled at the covers bunched around her waist, pulling them up over her head as well as she tried to ignore the persistent noise. Unfortunately, the snooze timer on the alarm went off again, shrilling loudly in her ear. With a muttered oath, she pushed the pillow and the blankets from her tired body and rolled onto her back.

She stared at the ceiling, letting her eyes adjust to the cheery brightness of early morning, knowing that it was going to be a long day. The tapping at the window got consistently louder as she lazed, unmoving, on the bed. Hermione slapped at the alarm clock as she struggled to sit up, noticing that not only was she alone in bed, but that she was also in yesterday's clothes.

Running a hand down her face, Hermione moved to the window and pushed it open. An owl rushed in, thrusting its leg at her with an indignant hoot. It tried to poke at her hand as she untied the missive, but she evaded its sharp beak.

"None of that, naughty girl," she reprimanded the bird, unraveling the scroll. Her mouth felt as though a thousand cotton balls had been stuffed into it.

*Hermione,*

*Here is the authorization you need to access my funds for the workmen. Do any repairs needed, even if it seems minor. Spare no expense; Neville's wife shouldn't have to worry about a thing. Send a message if you need anything else.*

Hermione reached over and grabbed a pencil off the nightstand.

Well, since you're being so generous, would you hire a house-elf or two? I think it would be wise to have someone there at all times with some magical ability, and I doubt Josie would take kindly to anyone moving in with her. A house-elf, especially one that comes with the house, I can guilt her into taking. It would ease my mind knowing she wasn't at the tender mercy of any extra ominous charms, hexes, or stray house pests I can't find. And I do mean hire; you know how I feel about the traditional arrangements.

*Hermione*

*PS Will you hurry up and get your arse home? Bloody git.*

With deft fingers, she tied her response to the owl's leg and shooed it off. She glanced at the clock on the nightstand and decided to make her morning shower a short affair.

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**Friday, June 7th**

*Rose Cottage*

Josie awoke, strangely disoriented, reaching over to cuddle with Neville, only to find his side of the bed empty and cold. She sat up sharply, looking around the darkened room for traces of her husband and finding none.

"Nev" His name died on her lips as she remembered why, her heart clenching over that knowledge.

She collapsed in on herself, sagging back against the pillows. With a shuddering sob, she brought her knees to her chest, curling into the fetal position. Everything hurt.

"Oh, Neville," she whispered, "I don't think I can do this."

It was so hard to believe he was gone. How was she to survive? Everything felt so alien. It just wasn't fair. She missed his crooked smile. She missed the way he was constantly forgetting the simplest things, yet could remember an inane fact like the first flower he'd given her. She missed the way his warm body would cradle hers, the feel of his body pressing against her.

And, on top of that, she had to leave their home. She and Neville had lived here since before Alice was born. Every crook and cranny held a memory of their life together.

Feeling raw and broken, she wrapped her arms around his pillow, and pressed her face against it. It still smelled faintly of him. With a gasping moan, she hugged the pillow close to her body, tears streaming down her face. Nothing felt right, and Josie had a feeling that nothing would ever feel right again.

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**Friday, June 7th**

*The Burrow*

"Nana Molly, where is my Mum?" asked a sleepy Alice as she moved into the kitchen.

"I sent her home last night, I thought it'd be nice to have some time, just the two of us."

"Really?" Alice asked, climbing into one of the chairs set around the table.

Molly chuckled, setting a glass of juice in front of the girl. "Yes, deary, really."

"Do... do you think she's all right?" Alice chewed on her lip in a gesture that reminded Molly of Hermione as a child. Molly moved around the table and pulled the girl into a hug.

"I think she is as well as she can be," Molly muttered into her hair as she placed a kiss on Alice's head.

"Would..." Alice looked up into Molly's face. "Would you be upset if we went home after breakfast so I can make sure?"

"No, Sweetie," she replied, cupping Alice's cheek. "I wouldn't be upset at all."

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**Friday, June 7th**

*Craig Mhor*

"Mr. Brigstaff, just what do you mean you can't get into all of the rooms?" Hermione asked, brushing back an annoying strand of hair. "I went through and unwarded the doors yesterday myself. There should be no reason you and your crew cannot get into any of them."

"That's just it, Ms. Granger, there's no supportable reason why we shouldn't," he replied, wiping his brow with a handkerchief. "Yet something is blocking access to the cellar and the master bedroom on the east side of the house. Nothing we have done, short of breaking the doors down, has had any effect."

"Have you tried taking the damn doors off their hinges?"

"We can't just go barging in without express permission to do that sort of work. We'd be liable if, by some chance, we damaged any of the property inside."

"I thought we already covered this in the initial contract," Hermione said sharply. "This house is going to be utilized by someone with a limited amount of magic, so we have to ensure that there is nothing that could potentially harm her. That means you go in, by force if necessary, to each and every room to ensure that there is nothing left behind that can do that."

"I understand your position, Ms. Granger; however, I do have to point out that it wasn't expressly stated that we could use any force necessary," he said, handing her an adjustment form requiring a signature. "Therefore, I wanted to ensure I had proper authorization before we attempted to do anything that might potentially cause damage to the structure."

"All right, you have it. Just get on with the work. This place needs to be ready by tomorrow morning," she replied, signing the paper with a flourish.

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**Friday, June 7th**

*Rose Cottage*

"Is there anything else you can think of that needs to go?" Molly asked Josie, shrinking the last box on the kitchen counter.

"I think we've pretty much gotten everything except for the linens on the bed, which I can grab tomorrow morning and pack in one of the suitcases before we leave."

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather stay at the Burrow tonight? You know you're always welcome, and it isn't as if we haven't the room."

"No, I think Alice and I need one last night here," Josie replied, leaning against the counter. "Closure, if you will."

"If you're sure...?"

"About as sure as I can be," Josie sighed out. "It feels so strange leaving here, and rationally I can see wanting to leave as fast as possible, a 'ripping the band-aid' solution. But, I just can't do it. I need to be here just a little longer, even if it's only for one night. Silly, huh?"

"No, not silly at all. I don't know how I would be if I lost Arthur, much less had to move out of my home only a week later." Molly turned to the fireplace. "You call me if you need anything at all tonight, okay? We'll all be here at eight in the morning, so make sure you get plenty of rest, because it'll be a trying day with my boys helping."

Josie crossed to the older woman and hugged her.

"I promise we'll sleep well tonight, and I'll see you tomorrow."

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A/N:

I'd like to thank Mark for eradicating my blaring Americanisms, and Rachel W for catching my grammar mistakes, they both are invaluable assets to this piece you are reading.

For those interested this takes place in the spring/summer of 2013. That means, by my calculation, Hermione Granger is 34-35 in this piece, and Neville would have been 33, almost 34 at the time of his death.

## Chapter 5

*Chapter 6 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

### Friday, June 7th

#### *Hermione Granger's Flat*

Hermione was in the middle of changing her clothes for bed when the sound of someone pounding on her door drifted to the back of her flat. Reaching for her robe, she strolled, barefoot, to the front room. Her eyes wandered to the clock on the mantle of her fireplace, noting that it was nearly midnight before she peeked through the eyehole to see who it was.

"What are you doing here?" she asked sharply, pulling the door open.

"Do I need a reason to be here, Granger?" he asked, leaning against the doorframe.

"If I invite you over, no. If you just randomly pop in, then yes."

"Ah, so, I'm only allowed when it's convenient; how utterly cosmopolitan of you. After spending nearly every night here for the last few weeks, I thought I'd warrant a better reception than this."

"Contrary to what you might believe, I don't need to have you underfoot at every juncture to live a fulfilling life. This isn't a relationship; we fuck, and that is it."

He pulled her roughly to him and lowered his head to hers. His lips crushed hers in a bruising kiss. Her body had no more than melted against his before he released her in a quick gesture. She flushed slightly as she wobbled a bit, trying to regain her balance.

"I suppose that means I should go," he whispered hoarsely, watching her with hooded eyes.

"Fucker," she snarled, grabbing the front of his robe and jerking him to her. They stumbled backwards into her apartment as her mouth met his. He nudged the door with his foot as they tottered past it.

"Does this mean I'm invited?" he growled against her lips as they fell onto the floor. She arched up against him as his hand slipped under her shirt; his short, blunt fingers flicked against her right nipple.

"Will you shut up and fuck me already?" she grunted, pulling at his robes.

He chuckled against her lips. "Shall I take that as a yes?"

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### Saturday, June 8th

#### *Rose Cottage*

"You hardly look awake, dear," Molly fussed, handing Josie a cup of coffee.

"Probably because it's an indecent hour to be awake, Molly."

"Aren't you just bright-eyed and bushy-tailed this morning," Ron quipped, grabbing a muffin from the table.

Molly slapped at his hand. "You just ate, Ronald," she scolded him.

"I'm a growing boy, Mum," he replied, shoving it into his mouth.

"More like growing a hollow leg," snickered Josie.

"Finish your coffee." Molly handed Josie a plate piled with eggs, beans, a cooked tomato, and a few slices of bacon.

"Molly, you really didn't have to bring me breakfast," Josie protested, eyeing the mass of food.

"Nonsense, dear, you haven't anything here to eat, and you'll need something sustaining to get through today."

"Yeah," Ron smirked, snagging a piece of Josie's bacon.

"Uncle Ron," squealed Alice as she rushed into the kitchen. She launched herself at the seated wizard.

"Well, if it isn't the princess," he grunted, catching her as she pounced. "Shouldn't you be dressed in the finest gowns and a crown, my dear?"

"No, silly," Alice giggled. "You don't wear a crown to bed; it would hurt."

"Oh, do forgive my lack of fashion etiquette, your Highness," he replied, kissing her nose.

"Good morning, Alice," Molly said, placing a plate of food, much like Josie's, in front of the little girl.

"Morning, Nana Molly." Alice turned around in Ron's lap and tugged him down to her. "Do you wanna share?" she whispered in his ear. "My stomach isn't big enough to eat it all."

"What time will Fred and George get here?" Josie asked, reaching for her cup of coffee.

"Any time now, Arthur went off to their shop about an hour ago," Molly replied, pouring herself a cup of tea. She leaned her hip against the counter and took a cautious sip. "If I know my boys, they probably were still lazing about, so I'm sure Arthur had to kick them out of bed."

"Nana Molly, can we bake cookies at the new house later today?" Alice asked, feeding a piece of bacon to Ron.

"I don't see why not, dearie," Molly answered. "In fact, if you want, you can spend the day helping me in the kitchen, we'll let everyone else do the heavy work."

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#### **Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"The house comes with a what?" Josie squeaked, giving Hermione a hard glare. "What on earth will I do with one of those?"

"Well, it's actually two, and you let them help out."

"Help out?" Josie griped. "Look, I'm not even sure I want one house-elf, much less two, and I'm supposed to let them help out? What if they start breeding?"

"Josie," Hermione hissed out in an annoyed voice. "You are at a serious disadvantage here. There are things you just cannot deal with, and there isn't always going to be someone available to come and rescue you if you get swatted by a curse or bitten by a magical pest."

"Fine," Josie replied in a resigned voice. "What are they supposed to do?"

"Whatever you need them to, within reason. They have their own special brand of magic, and the first duty of a house-elf is the welfare and well being of its charges. That means they will take care of any magical menaces; they're attuned to the house itself, so they can get past almost any wards, and they are sickeningly eager to please."

"Wonderful," Josie grimaced. "You still haven't answered my question, though. What if they start breeding? I mean, are they like cats? Do they have litters of little baby house-elves? Will I have to potty train them, or worse, change diapers?"

Hermione shuddered. "Thank you, I so needed that vision of house-elf sex," she bit out with a grimace. "I really don't think you'll have that problem. One, they're only able to produce offspring once every six years, and two, both of the elves are older females, well past the age where they would have babies."

"When should I expect them?"

"They should already be here, though if they aren't, they should arrive at any moment. If it helps, just think of them as a shorter, older version of Molly."

"Great," groaned Josie, "just what I need, two more voices fussing over me, trying to fatten me up."

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#### **Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"Should I worry about where this leads to?" Josie asked, handing Hermione a box of dishes.

"No," grunted Hermione, taking the box. "I had the workmen try to open the cellar yesterday; I was hoping to get anything dangerous out of the way, in case Alice made her way down there, but the door just would not budge. I even had them take the hinges off, in an attempt to get it loose, and after that failed, we tried brute force, in an endeavor to break it down, but nothing happened. Whatever sort of spell or locking mechanism is on it, I have no idea how to remove," Hermione huffed as she hauled a box past the cellar door. "I would suggest you just ignore it, since I doubt you'll be able to get in, and make it sound as unpleasant as possible so Alice isn't tempted to try and explore."

"Lovely," grumbled Josie, "give me an impossible task why don't you. Try to persuade a child away from a mysterious challenge; I think I'd have better luck trying to get you to have hot, torrid sex with Ron."

"Ew," squealed Hermione, "are you trying to turn my stomach today? First, you plant an image of house-elf sex in my head, and now you're trying to make me poke my eyes out. Please, Ron and sex just do not go together."

"Oi, why are you two hauling the boxes like that?" came a voice from behind them.

"Wouldn't it make sense to either leave them shrunk or levitate them?" asked another voice as the box floated out of Hermione's hands.

"That's easy for you to say, George," Josie groused, pointing a finger at the ginger-haired wizard.

"Hey," responded Fred, stepping around his brother, "it's not like we haven't offered to make you a potion to help with that."

"As if she'd be stupid enough to take anything you two concocted," snorted Hermione.

"Why," started Fred.

"Not?" finished George.

"Oh, I don't know; perhaps the fact that you turned Alice into a pink canary on her last birthday?" responded Hermione.

"No, I think it was Ton-Tongue Toffees," Josie interjected. "I swear my tongue and lips still haven't recovered from the allergic reaction I had."

"How were we supposed to know that you were allergic..." George began in a defensive tone.

"To the main ingredient in the Deflation Potion and that you'd have a massive reaction to it?" asked Fred, finishing George's sentence.

"Will you two grow up? The whole finishing one another's sentences is annoying," snapped Hermione. "It's like you own one brain; do you two do anything on your own, or is it always together?"

"Now, Hermione, if you wanted to know if we do everything together," Fred replied with a cheeky grin, "all you had to do was ask."

"Never mind, I don't want to know."

"Are you sure?" George asked, wiggling his eyebrows.

"You two are incorrigible," laughed Josie, pushing past George.

"Yes, but you love us this way," he replied, pulling her into a hug.

"Gerroff," Josie squealed, pushing him away. "You're all wet, smelly, and gross."

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### **Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"Mum," Alice called out. "Mummy, come here."

"Where is here?" Josie called up the stairs.

Alice raced to the top of the stairs and peered down at Josie. "Come on, Mummy, you have to see this." She darted away before Josie could respond.

Josie climbed the stairs, wondering what had Alice so excited. Just as she neared the top step, Alice rushed down the hall and grabbed her hand.

"You have to see this," Alice huffed out excitedly, pulling Josie down the hall.

"See what?" Josie asked as they neared a closed door.

"This," Alice said vaguely, throwing open the door.

Josie peered into the room, noting that all of Alice's bedroom furniture had been set up and her belongings put away.

"You've been busy, love. It looks like you've already got all your toys unpacked," Josie said, ruffling her daughter's hair.

"No, not that," Alice insisted moving into the room. "Oh, no," she wailed, "it's gone."

"What's gone? Do you mean one of the house-elves?"

"No," Alice sniffled. "Nana Molly and me already met Myrea and Tinker. They helped me do my room." She turned to Josie. "There was a kitty in here. I shut the door so it wouldn't get out, b but, he's gone," she sobbed, wrapping her arms around Josie's waist.

"Honey, are you sure it was a kitten?"

Alice nodded her head. "It was black all over, except for a white spot on its nose," she whispered.

"Well," Josie said, brushing her hand through Alice's hair, "he's not here now. How about we keep an eye out for him; though, I don't know if we can keep him if we find him. How about we ask Aunt Hermione about the cat, okay?"

"Yes, Mummy," Alice sighed, wiping her face. "Do you think if Aunt Hermione says it's okay, that I could keep him? Please?"

"We'll see," Josie muttered.

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A/N:

I'd like to thank Rachel W for catching all my grammar mistakes and Mark for trying to put a little Brit in me (that sounds suspiciously dirty). The whole little house-elf breeding sequence can be blamed, entirely, on Larilee (she knows why).

I have no idea if the eggs, beans, cooked tomato, and bacon are standard fare for an English breakfast, but I distinctly remember being served this on many occasions the few times I've been across the pond. However, sometimes there was a variation of kippers and mushrooms added to the mix along with a hot dog like sausage (which are nothing like American sausages). I'll go into the whole haggis fiasco another time (believe me, it's an unusual experience).

# Chapter 6

## Chapter 7 of 12

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"A cat?" Hermione asked with a puzzled expression, looking over at where Molly sat. Molly shook her head, as if to say she hadn't any idea.

"Oh, yes, it was all black, and it had a white spot just on the tip of its nose," Alice responded excitedly, squirming on Hermione's lap. "I tried to pet it, but it wouldn't let me. So, I tried to get Mummy, but it had disappeared." She leaned back and tugged Hermione's head down. "Do you think it's a magic cat?" she asked in an awed whisper.

"I don't know," Hermione whispered back, wrapping her arms around the girl's waist.

"Mummy said," Alice began, leaning her head on Hermione's shoulder, "that if you said it was all right, that I could keep it. Can I keep the kitty?"

"I errrrmm," Hermione sputtered, staring down into Alice's eager, earnest face. She looked up at Molly again, only to see the older woman trying to stifle a laugh over her predicament. "I can't give you permission to keep that cat," she said with a sigh, watching the happy expression fall from Alice's face.

"Oh," Alice sniffed, her eyes filling with tears. "I can't have the kitty?"

"I didn't say that," she backpedaled, trying to keep the girl from crying. "I just... Well, this isn't my house, so I really can't give you permission."

"Well, who can?" Alice asked with a sniff, rubbing the back of her arm across her eyes. "Do you think I can ask them?"

"Why don't I talk to your Mum first, and then, we'll go from there, if she tells me it's okay."

"You don't believe me, Aunt Hermione?" Alice asked, her voice hiccupping over Hermione's name.

"Alice," Molly interrupted, finally taking pity on Hermione, "it isn't that Hermione doesn't believe you. She just wants to confirm things with your Mum before she takes any action; adults are like that."

"But why?" she asked, twisting around in Hermione's lap.

"Because adults are silly," Hermione responded, tweaking Alice's nose.

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**Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"What's all this about a cat?" Hermione asked, striding into the master bedroom.

"Cat?" Josie asked, perplexed. "Oh, the cat. Alice thought she had a cat trapped in her bedroom, but when I got up there, I didn't see anything. Here, can you take that side?" She threw a corner of the fitted sheet over to Hermione.

"Alice was going on and on about it downstairs." Hermione grabbed the sheet and started to tuck it under the mattress. "She even said that you would allow her to keep it, if, of course, I said it was all right. When I told her I didn't know if she could keep it or not, she started to cry."

"She certainly is bringing out the big guns today," Josie said, flapping out the straight sheet over the mattress. "I told her we would talk to you about it, but in her mind, she must've heard 'Aunt Hermione has to give permission.'"

"I almost caved," Hermione mumbled, reaching over and pulled the edge of the flat sheet tight against the mattress before tucking it under.

Josie laughed, "It's not easy to tell her no, even when she isn't on the verge of tears." She unfolded a blanket and tossed a side to Hermione. "Do you think there is a cat in here?"

"I don't know," Hermione sighed. "It would be awfully strange if there were a cat living in here; then again, if it were a Kneazle, that might explain what it was doing in a seemingly abandoned house."

"A Kneazle? Is that some sort of strange magical cat known only to the Wizarding world?" Josie asked, bending down to grab the comforter. She flapped it out over the bed, pulling her end of the blanket tight as Hermione worked the other end.

"Actually," Hermione laughed, "a Kneazle isn't really a cat. It's a very intelligent cat-like creature that can detect unsavory or suspicious persons, reacting badly to them. They are technically magical creatures and do have some magical abilities. If they take a liking to you, though, they make bang-up pets, if you can get one; they are quite rare these days."

"Really? And you know this because?"

"I had one, once upon a time, while I was in school. Although, Crookshanks wasn't a full Kneazle."

"You?" Josie asked, raising an eyebrow. "You had a pet? Something that needed an actual commitment?"

"I'll have you know, I'm not above making a commitment," Hermione replied with an indignant sniff before tossing a pillow at Josie's head.

"Of course you aren't," snickered Josie as she dodged the pillow.

"Yes, well, we all can't be as lucky as you and find love in the middle of nowhere," Hermione muttered. Josie's face went pale. "Oh, shite," she moaned, "I I didn't mean that to come out the way it did, Josie."

"No, it's all right, Hermione," she said softly. "Neville and I were incredibly lucky." Josie bent down to pick up the pillow, her fingers fluffing out the creases on the pillowcase

before placing it at the top of the bed. "I shouldn't've teased you, I know..." she trailed off.

Hermione sat down on the edge of the bed. "I used to be so jealous of you and Neville," she whispered. Josie sat down on the other end. "It wasn't that I was jealous of you for finding Neville, I'd known him since we were eleven and, well, frankly, still can't imagine how anyone would think of him as a 'love' interest, but you did. And it was almost as if a person could see the affection between you two. My parents were like that, and I suppose that I..." Hermione hesitated, sneaking a look over at Josie, "I was jealous that I hadn't found that."

"I always thought you were happy as you are," Josie said quietly.

"Oh, I'm not unhappy, not really," Hermione sighed out. "It's just... Sometimes it'd be nice to have someone who was happy to have me as I am. Though, I'm beginning to think I'm too old for all that, too set in my ways now to change how I live."

"Change comes whether we want it to or not," Josie replied, leaning back against the headboard. "This isn't exactly where I thought I'd be, and certainly not without Neville, but," she shrugged, "here I am."

"You at least tried," Hermione muttered, pulling her knees up on to the bed, and arranging herself so she was seated Indian style on the bed beside Josie. "You tried, and you and Neville had something special, created something special when you had Alice. All I've got is a four room flat and an occasional night visitor."

"Nothing says that it always has to be that way, Hermione; if you want things to change, then you have to be willing to make allowances for change."

"That's just it, Josie. I'm not sure I want to make those sort of concessions," Hermione said, looking down at her hands. "I'm not the easiest person to get along with, and I'm really not sure I want to be structuring things and changing things about how I live to fit in with the possibility of... well, of having someone I might not particularly like all the time there... with me." She looked up at Josie. "Does that make sense, or does it make me sound terribly spoiled?"

"No, it doesn't sound spoiled, and yes, it does make sense. Yet, I do have to point out that every relationship goes through points where one side or the other makes concessions. Neville, as much as I loved him, wasn't the easiest person to live with." Josie shifted on the bed. "As much as you think everything between us was perfect, it wasn't. Neville and I, we were normal, fallible people; we had to work at being together, even when it seemed like everything was perfect. I will say though, that if you really want to love someone, then you will, and it won't be all roses. But, in the end, it is worth it."

"Is it really?" Hermione asked softly. "Can you really say that now, even after everything you've been going through lately? Now that he's gone?"

"Hermione," Josie hissed out, her lips compressed in a tight line, though the words were clearly audible. "How can you ask 'was it worth it'? You should know better than I what things are worth it in life."

"Sometimes I wonder," Hermione said, more to herself than to Josie, as she slid her feet down to the floor.

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#### **Saturday, June 8th**

*Craig Mhor*

"Molly," Josie started, wrapping her arms around the plump shorter woman. "I have to thank you for everything today. I don't think I'd be anywhere near as done if you hadn't come."

"That's what family is for," Molly responded, giving Josie a hard squeeze. "I'm just glad Fred and George were behaved enough to work, instead of causing their usual havoc."

"Havoc? We don't cause havoc, do we?" Fred quipped, skirting around Molly to get a seat at the table.

"Shush, you, you're more trouble than you're worth sometimes, George."

"Oi, see that? She can't even remember which one I am. What kind of Mum forgets the name of her child?" he joshed, sending a wink to Josie.

"Stop baiting your Mom," Josie admonished, slapping Fred on the back of the head.

"Hey now, no cause for abuse! Unless," he angled a wide-eyed look up at her, ruining it by waggling his eyebrows, "you just can't keep your hands to yourself, and if that's the case, we can run upstairs for a quick snog."

"Incorrigible," Molly muttered, heading back into the kitchen. "I've raised incorrigible children."

"You are truly terrible," Josie laughed, setting a napkin beside his plate.

"Oooouch, you cruel woman, how you wound me to the quick." He fiddled with the place setting.

"Stop that," Josie commanded, reaching over to slap at his hand. "Don't think I'm not on to you and your brother. I should banish you both outside until supper is ready, that way I know you two haven't tampered with anything." She folded another napkin and set beside another plate, as Ron came in carrying the flatware. "In fact," she said, taking the forks from Ron, "why don't all of you go outside for a bit. Molly and I can finish up in here."

"What did you do now?" Ron asked in a hushed whisper.

"Shush," Fred whispered back with a conspiring air, "we're getting out of making supper; don't ruin it." He pushed back the chair and looped an arm around Ron's shoulders. "I say we make haste."

"And no getting Alice into trouble," Josie called after them as they walked towards the door.

Fred turned back with a Cheshire grin. "Would we do that?" He leaned over to Ron and said in a loud stage whisper, "Are you taking her up this time, or am I?"

"No brooms either," Josie yelled as they walked out the door.

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#### **Saturday, June 8th**

*Hermione Granger's Flat*

"Are you still here?" Hermione called out wearily, stumbling from the fireplace into her tiny living room.

"Would you be disappointed if I wasn't?" he asked, leaning against her bedroom door.

Hermione chewed on her lip as she considered his question. "Would you be upset if I said I don't know?"



"That depends," he said softly, moving to where she stood in the living room. She instinctively backed up, the back of her legs hitting the couch.

"On what?" she whispered.

"On whether you'd only miss the sex, or me, if I was gone," he replied. "Or if you'd be relieved that I wasn't here at all." He reached a hand out, cupping her cheek, as he moved in closer.

"I don't know," she mumbled into his thumb as he rubbed it across her lower lip.

"Didn't we just have this argument last night?" he asked softly, bending his head down to hers. She felt the sharp pricks of his five o'clock shadow scrape across her neck as his lips skimmed lightly against her jaw.

"No," she gasped out as his mouth worked its way down her neck. "Last night we argued over your right to be here, uninvited."

He pulled back from her, watching her face. "Ah, and the verdict was?"

She looked away from his searching gaze. "What do you want from me?"

"Right this minute?" he asked. She nodded her head slowly, still not looking at him. He cupped her jaw, using his fingers to force her to look at him.

"Right this minute," he whispered in a seductive voice against her ear, "all I can think about is being buried deep inside of you." Hermione shivered as his voice washed over her. "Your nails digging into my back, as I move in and out of you." He punctuated that comment with a quick nip at the base of her throat. "All I can think about is the feel of you, clenched around me, the tightness of you rippling in orgasm as you scream my name."

"I I." She tried to speak, but he placed a finger on her lips.

"Don't speak," he hissed out, angling his head so he could brush his lips across hers. His arms wound around her, and she could feel the fullness of his erection pressing through the layer of robes. She leaned into him, pressing her hips against him, and he gasped in pleasure against her mouth.

"Can we at least make it to the bed tonight?" Hermione asked breathlessly when their kiss broke.

"Not in the mood for the floor tonight?" he chuckled, pulling her to him once more.

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A/N: Information about Kneazles can be found on the Harry Potter Lexicon. As ever, I would like to thank Rachel W for catching my foibles, and Mark for trying to civilize me (apparently being a brash American makes me quite uncivilized, even if I come from good English stock). Any fubar portions within this are solely my own, as I can be a brain dead twit at times.

Just a quick note to say that this story will be caught up to where I'm currently at (chapter 10 of this story is currently with my betas), so soon y'all will have to wait as long as everyone else for updates.

## Chapter 7

### *Chapter 8 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**March 15, 2005**

### *Death Valley*

It was a place of brutal beauty, where jagged rocks of red cut into the crystalline blue sky, and tufts of tumbleweed bled into dashes of color as fragile flowers rose up from dry earth. It was a desolate land, often full of stark nothingness, where serrated fissures of rock separated the lush Californian coast from the east. In a space of pure desert, hardy flowers climbed out of the barren sand, clinging to large granite rocks that rose out of the earth like giant teeth.

Josie Rutledge hoisted up her Pentax Ds 35MM with telephoto lens, trying to frame the right shot as the air rippled over the sand. In her back pocket, she had a super slim Pentax Optio digital camera, to catch those moments where a click and point might work better than the manual focus camera. The very air seemed to shimmer with anticipation as she moved back, her fingers working the lens to bring the rippling effect into sharp focus.

As soon as she took the first shot, her fingers twisted the lens to a wider vision, catching bits of the blue sky in the frame as she triggered another shot. Satisfied that she had gotten the best possible angle, she moved on, keeping the tourist bus in sight as she positioned her body for another dramatic shot. Just as she had focused, her finger poised above the trigger of the camera to capture the beauty before her, a dark patch of material fluttered before her lens.

"Hey, do ya mind?" she snapped out, annoyed that her shot was ruined.

The figure in front of her whipped around, clearly startled.

"The others are over there," Josie said, waving her arm behind her. "If you're looking for better plant samples, I doubt you'll find them over here. So, if you don't mind," she gestured to her camera.

The man in front of her just stood there, gaping at her, with an astonished expression on his face.

"Look," she sighed, "I don't mean to be rude, but you're ruining my shot. Could you please go join the other botanical geeks over there and let me finish this?"

"I – er – I," he stammered, still staring at her. "I didn't realize anyone was over here."

"Yes, well, as you can see, I am, and you are in the way, so can you move?"

“Oh – I – yes,” he spluttered, moving behind her.

Josie tried to ignore his presence as she tried to recapture the visual effect she wanted. She moved forward, crouching low to the ground as she tried different angles.

“Simply stunning, isn’t it?” he muttered as she took aim.

Josie turned her head. “It’s beautiful.”

“What do you do with your photos once it’s all said and done?” he asked, kneeling beside her.

“It depends,” she grunted, shifting her weight.

“On what?”

She shrugged. “A lot of things.”

“You’re not a very communicative person, are you?”

She pivoted on her heels and found herself face to face with the man. He had floppy brown hair and a crooked smile that seemed to light up his whole face.

“I can be,” she started defensively. “I’m just not in the habit of talking to strange men, even ones with interesting accents, in the middle of nowhere when I’m trying to work.”

“Oh, so this is your profession?” She let out a hiss of impatient air, but he continued as if he hadn’t heard it. “Do you really think I have an interesting accent?”

She eased back, plunking down on the ground, heedless of the sand and pushed her backpack off her shoulders. She swung it around, unzipped the side pocket, and pulled out a bottle of water.

“You don’t give up, do you?” she asked, slowly unscrewing the plastic top off the water bottle.

“No, not often,” he laughed. “Neville,” he held out his hand. “Neville Longbottom.”

“Josie,” she grunted, grabbing his hand.

“And do you have a last name? Or is it just ‘Josie’?”

“For now it’s just Josie,” she replied, pulling her hand from his.

“Cagey one, aren’t you?”

“Most of the time.” She brought the water bottle up to her lips and took a long drink.

“So, are you here to photograph the various species of wild flowers, or do you come here often?” he asked with a wide grin.

Josie sputtered. “You do realize that is **the** absolute worst pick up line ever.”

“Yes, well, while it is a perfectly awful line, it does lead to some pertinent answers.”

“Such as?”

“Whether or not you are from around here, and if not, then at least an idea of how long you’re going to be around here so that I might take you out for a drink or something of that nature.”

“Are you asking me out on a date?”

“I – er – yes, I suppose I am.”

“What if I told you I wasn’t interested?”

“Oh,” he said in a dejected tone. “Does – I mean – are you not interested, then?”

“Well, it depends,” she started, retightening the lid on her water bottle. He waited, his eyes on her face as she stuffed the bottle back into her bag and resituated it. The silence stretched between them. Finally, just as he was on the verge of asking, ‘on what,’ she continued, “Where are you planning to take me?”

“I – that is.” He flushed bright red as he cast about for the right words. “Do – do you mean it?” he squeaked out.

The tourist bus let out a loud blaring sound that signaled the end of her time there.

“That’s for me,” she said, pushing up off the ground. She swung the backpack back on and started toward the bus. Neville quickly scrambled up after her.

“Wait,” he panted. “Did you mean it?”

Josie turned back to face him. He fidgeted for a moment, as though unsure of whether he should touch her or not. He looked so utterly unsure of himself in an almost endearing way.

“Meet me tomorrow, in front of Treasure Island, just before the eight o’clock showing of the pirate ships,” she said, turning from him.

“Treasure Island?” he yelled at her.

“Yes,” she yelled back. “And wear something cooler with comfortable shoes.”

“I’m British,” he yelled, watching her walk off in the distance. “I only own comfortable shoes.”

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A/N:

In case you’re wondering where the ending line came from, I’ve actually had someone say that to me, in Vegas. I’m not sure if he was being flippant, or what, but, I told him to bring comfortable shoes because I was going to make him walk the entire strip with me, to which he replied, with a sniff. “I’m British, dear, I only own comfortable shoes.”

Thanks to Rachel W for getting this chapter back so quickly, and to Andy, aka VainRogue, for agreeing to look this over for me (such a cute young Englishman). I promise I’ll drag you all over Vegas if you’re ever there playing the lost tourist.

This spring heralded a once in a lifetime event in the western desert areas of Southern California and Nevada, an event that brought out a startling array of flowers, some

of which haven't been seen in over a hundred years. It was a particularly wet spring all over, and the desert areas were no exception. If you would like to read more about this fascinating event, please check out:

<http://www.death-valley.us/article1224.html>

<http://www.gotorenatahoe.com/news/stories/html/2005/05/04/1735.php?sps=&sch=&sp1=gotorenatahoe&sp2=goto+ski&sp3=goto+ski+main>

Some awesome photos of this spring in the desert:

<http://www.desertusa.com/wildflo/rockquarry3.jpg>

<http://www.desertusa.com/wildflo/dvarea1.jpg>

<http://www.pbase.com/ageojo/image/41589891>

<http://www.pbase.com/ageojo/image/41589895>

<http://www.pbase.com/ageojo/image/41589898>

## Chapter 8

*Chapter 9 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**March 16, 2005**

*Las Vegas*

The faux deck that served as the sidewalk in front of the Treasure Island Casino was crowded as the first showing of the nightly pirate battle drew near. People pushed into the front crevices of the deck, trying to get the best possible view, pressing against one another to create a human gridlock.

Josie moved through the crowd, squeezing past a group of Japanese tourists, taking pictures of the opulent city. She scanned the area for the young Englishman she'd met the day before, hardly daring to believe that he'd show. She twisted, hiking up on her tiptoes, wondering why her brain had come up with this place, at this time of day. There were far too many people.

Just as she was about to give up and head back, Josie felt a hand on her shoulder. She whipped around and caught sight of her intended date standing a few feet from her.

"You made it," she yelled over the din, scooting around a heavysset man in shorts with black tube socks pulled up to his knees. "I didn't actually think you would show up."

"Is it always like this?" he panted.

"What?"

"Is it always like this?" he yelled louder, as the crowd surged back, making him bump into the wooden wall.

"Pretty much," Josie yelled back with a huge grin.

"And they do this every night?"

"Every hour, actually."

"Why?"

"It's a form of advertisement. People stop and watch the show, then after it's done they wander in to the casino. Each casino has its own gimmick to draw people in."

"Does it?"

"Does it what?" she asked, watching the lights flicker out across the fake pond as the two ships battled.

"Does it draw you in?"

"Look around you. There are people from all walks of life milling around, taking a moment to just stop and enjoy what's laid out before them. Las Vegas is one of the few truly decadent places where people are free to..." She stopped and turned towards him. "Yes, this draws me in. I people watch, and this," she waved her arm, "is as good as it gets. It's the 'it doesn't count' attitude; it lets people express themselves in ways that they might never have thought of before. I often just stroll around, taking random pictures, capturing these infinite moments of freedom."

"And freedom is important to you," he stated.

"Isn't it important to everyone?" she asked. "Too many times people try to lock themselves up in cookie cutter molds, they feel as if they have to fit into what the public wants them to be. *Be skinny, be beautiful, be straight, get married, have children, go to church every Sunday, believe in the 'one true' god, don't get a tattoo, go to college, make lots of money, be productive, stop chasing the dream...* I could go on and on about what the conventional world wants. It's just such a shame!" Josie leaned against the railing and faced the pirate ship, watching as it slowly sank. "I'm sorry," she mumbled. "I doubt you wanted to hear a lecture."

Neville reached out to grab her hand. "I don't mind the lecture, not when it comes from such a passionate advocate." Josie threw him a hesitant smile, and tried to extract her hand, but he threaded his fingers through hers.

The crowd slowly moved on as the show ended, bodies pressing against each other as people tried to move on to the next nightly show.

"So where are we off to now?" Neville asked.

Josie cocked her head to the side and glanced his way. "Have you ever been here before?"

"No," he said, with a slight shake of his head.

"I know just the thing then," she whispered, tugging on his hand.

"That sounds almost ominous."

"What's wrong, Brit boy, don't you trust me?"

"I'm not sure trust is the right word," he mumbled as he followed her lead.

"Really?" Josie shot back over her shoulder. "What would you call it, then?"

"Oh, no," Neville laughed. "There's no way to answer that without it coming out wrong. I'll just happily follow your lead tonight, and leave it at that."

"Just remember you said that," she shot back. With a sharp wave of her hand and a harsh: "Taxi!" Josie flagged down a cab.

"Climb in," she told him with a wave of her hand as she bent down and through the door window of the cab. Neville stood on the curb merely staring at the cab with an odd expression as Josie instructed the driver. She pulled out of the window and looked at him oddly.

"Is there something wrong?" she asked, opening the back door.

"I – er – no," he replied. "It's just... smaller."

"Smaller?"

"A bit. The cabs are – not so compact, back home."

"If you're feeling claustrophobic, we can always walk," she offered, pulling back from the cab.

"No – really, it's all right." He folded his body down to sit on the seat and slide across.

"You sure?" Josie asked, taking a tentative dip down to sit on the cab seat.

He reached across her and pulled the door shut. "Yes, I'm sure."

The cab darted off down the congested strip, zooming around slower moving cars as they headed north. Josie watched as Neville's fingers gripped at the door handle, his knuckles blanching white. She reached over to grasp his other hand.

"We could have walked."

"I'm fine, truly." Neville gave her a weak smile. "So, can you tell me about where we're going, or is that a secret?"

"Why don't you look out the window since we're here."

"The Crown and Anchor Pub? Is this what I think it is?"

"I thought I'd take you to one of my favorite watering holes; about as close to England as I'll ever get."

"Brilliant," he exclaimed, giving her a genuine smile this time. "Oi, does this mean you only went out with me because I'm British?"

"I did tell you I found your accent appealing," she replied, sliding out of the cab.

"You, m'dear, are a tease," he groused, following her out of the car.

"Perhaps," she responded, pulling him up the sidewalk. "You'll just have to stick around to find out."

"That sounds like a challenge," he chuckled. "Dare I hope I'm up to it?"

A/N:

For those of you who caught the mention of *cookie cutter molds*, and why that phrase would mean anything at all, I couldn't resist. I know, I'm a **bad, bad** girl.

## Chapter 9

*Chapter 10 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**March 20, 2005**

*Henderson, Nevada*

"Are you going out with him again tonight?" Sarah asked. She reached across the counter and snagged an apple from the bowl. Taking a bite of it, she watched Josie dig around in the refrigerator with a measured look. "Do you really think that is wise?"

"Why wouldn't it be wise?" Josie asked, looking at her roommate over the refrigerator door.

"Well, you hardly know this man – he could be an serial killer, a rapist, or God knows what; yet the past four nights, you've been out with him."

"I doubt he's a serial killer or a rapist," Josie laughed out, pouring herself a glass of soda. "Trust me; Neville isn't the type."

"Really," Sarah drawled, her voice laced with sarcasm. "I bet that's what Jeffery Dahmer's dates said about him."

"Damn it, Sarah! I'm not stupid. We meet in public places; it's not like I'm really ever alone with him, although the more time I spend with him the more time I want alone time with him."

"I never said you were stupid, Josie. I just –" Sarah sighed. "You don't have the greatest track record with men, and I don't want to see you get hurt. Especially if this guy turns out to be a creep who's only looking for a green card."

"Green card?" Josie gasped. "Where the hell are you coming up with that? I've known Neville for only five days, way too soon to be thinking along the lines of permanent."

Sarah shrugged. "You never know. Remember what happened with Adriana and that internet jerk? He was only interested in her because she was an American citizen and could get him into the country with no fuss or muss by simply saying 'I do.'"

"Yes – but I didn't meet Neville online, and I don't think he's interested in becoming an American citizen. Besides, he's here on a work visa, so I doubt he's in any need of rushing to the altar."

"But you're interested."

"Yes, I'm interested," Josie said, throwing a dreamy smile at Sarah. "You'd be interested, too."

"Okay, I'll bite." Sarah took one last bite out of her apple and tossed the core into the garbage bin. "Tell me about him."

"I'll do better than that," Josie said, taking a sip of soda. "Why don't you come and meet him?"

"And play third wheel? I don't think so."

"Not tonight – I'd rather not have you coming down on Neville like a ton of bricks, especially when he's not expecting it. How about we make arrangements to meet later in the week; I'm sure we can scrounge up a suitable escort for you."

"Oh, great," Sarah moaned. "A blind date. You're really developing a sadistic streak, Josie."

~~oOo~~oOo~~oOo~~

**March 23, 2005**

*Henderson, Nevada*

"Sarah, can you zip this up for me?" Josie asked, turning her back to Sarah. "I can't quite reach it in the middle."

"Who are you, and what have you done to my best friend?" Sarah asked, pulling the two sides of the dress together so she could zip it up. "I can't believe you're actually wearing a dress tonight – you never wear dresses."

"Hey, now," Josie laughed. "I'm not that bad. I do dress up on occasion."

"Funerals don't count."

"They don't?"

"No," Sarah chuckled, "they don't. Neither do weddings for that matter, and those, incidentally, have been the only type of events I've seen you get dressed up for."

Josie scrunched up her nose. "I dress up for more than that." Sarah merely raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I do."

"And that is why you're using my make-up?"

"No," Josie said with a smile. "The reason I'm using your make-up is because I know you've got taste. Why use store brand stuff when I know you've got the good stuff – especially when I know you'll get exasperated at my efforts and volunteer to apply it for me?"

"One of these days," Sarah said with a beleaguered sigh, "you're going to join the ranks of womanhood and actually learn how to do this yourself."

"Yes, but until then, I have you."

"You're such a brat," Sarah snapped, gently pushing Josie away. She watched Josie's reflection in the mirror as she pushed an earring through her right ear. "So, where is your dashing Englishman taking us tonight?"

"Actually," Josie replied, wrinkling her nose, "I'm not sure."

"I bet you just love that," Sarah mumbled under her breath. "How did he manage to convince you to let him select the place?"

"Would you believe a bouquet of purple daisies?"

"Daisies?" Sarah asked incredulously. "You capitulated for daisies? It must be love, if you're letting him select the restaurant tonight. Does he realize how you are about food?"

Josie stuck her tongue out at Sarah. "Gee, so funny. Yes, Ms. Thang, he knows how I am about food."

"Don't take that tone with me; I remember the last pizza we had delivered. You had the poor guy in tears."

"As he should have been," Josie responded with a snort. "It took him nearly ninety minutes to get here. The pizza was disgusting, the garlic bread was stone cold, and don't get me started on the fried zucchini."

"I told you not to order from Tropicana Pizza," Sarah said with an exaggerated sigh, shuddering slightly. "But you just *had* to have fried zucchini. I can't understand why you eat that crap –" Sarah was interrupted by a knocking at the front door.

"Oh, shit," Josie moaned, brushing a nervous hand down the front of her dress as she moved to the door. "I can't believe he's here already."

Sarah pointed at Josie's bare feet. "Mmm, Cinderella, don't you think you need to be wearing shoes before the prince can find them?"

"Crap! Crap! Crap!"

"Find your shoes; I'll go let the gentlemen in."

"Be nice, Sarah," Josie hissed as her roommate left the room.

"I'm always nice," she tossed back over her shoulder.

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A/N:

As ever, I'd like to thank Rachel for going over this with a fine-tooth comb. I'd say this chapter was Brit-betaed, but Mark is AWOL so any and all blatant Americanisms are because, well, I am a dorky American. All fubared portions are solely my own mistake.

Yes, there is an actual Tropicana Pizza in Las Vegas/Henderson, and yes, it is disgusting. I, unfortunately, learned that the hard way when I ordered pizza for us at my Mom's at seven. The guy called at 8:15 asking for directions to her place (which I had given when I ordered the \$35 dollar monstrosity), and he didn't actually arrive until 8:50. The pizza was gross; I mean Little (nasty) Caesars' makes a better pizza. I was not a happy camper, hence the reference.

## Chapter 10

*Chapter 11 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**April 3, 2005**

*Quincy, California*

It was broad daylight the first time Neville kissed her.

The sky was dark blue; the sound of a particularly loud lawn mower reverberated through the air as she lead him to their destination. Josie's palms were sweaty. She had never actually brought anyone here before never wanted to bring anyone here before.

Neville must have noticed her distress as they crossed the lawn, because he reached out a hand and wove his fingers between hers. Josie gave him a hesitant smile as they walked along the immaculate green lawn, dotted by rows of inlaid granite snuggled close to the ground.

Her heart pounded loudly against her chest so loudly she was sure Neville could hear its strangely rapid tattoo. He gave her hand a quick squeeze as she slowed their pace. Without a word, he pulled her close to his body, brushing back a few strands of hair from her face.

Josie's breath caught in her throat. His eyes such beautiful eyes scanned her face as his head bent closer.

Oddly, the thought that his lips were impossibly soft flittered across her brain as he gently pressed them against hers. Her hands went up to clutch at his arms, trying to hold herself up as her knees went weak. He nibbled lightly at her lips, tasting faintly of cinnamon, and Josie pressed herself closer to him, wanting to taste more.

And then, as suddenly as it started, it ended.

Neville pulled back from her, panting slightly. He reached up to cup her face, a small smile crossing his own as she slowly opened her eyes to look at him. With a small, "thank you," she took his hand and pulled him up the grassy path. Neither said a word as she drew him closer to the spot.

**Rutledge**

Nathan J. and Claire R.

*Nov. 11, 1953 Aug. 16, 1956*

**Feb 15, 1995**

Beloved Mother and Father

"Mom... Dad," Josie started, a slight hitch in her voice. "I've... I've brought someone to meet you." She squeezed his hand and brought it up to her chest. "His name is Neville, and... I think you would have liked him."

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**April 3, 2005**

*Quincy, California*

Josie knocked on Neville's hotel door. In the time it took for him to answer, her brain went through an entire litany on why this was a bad idea. Those thoughts, however, evaporated as soon as he opened the door.

"I ah." She licked her dry lips as she tried to string her rehearsed speech together. "I hope you don't mind," she finally started, "but it seemed silly to have two different rooms when one would suffice. Don't you think?"

"You you want to sleep? In here?" he stammered out.

"If that's okay with you?" she asked hesitantly. "If it's not, I can I can go and get the other room back."

"No," Neville said with a little more force than he intended. In a softer tone he said, "No, you're more than welcome."

"Are you going to let me in, then?"

Neville's face flushed a bit as he moved back from the doorway to let her in.

"The there's two beds in here," he said softly as she passed him. "Pick which ever one you'll feel most comfortable in."

Josie turned to him, so close she could almost feel the heat of his body. "That will be easy," she whispered, stepping closer to him. "Which one are you in?"

Neville's eyes darkened at her pronouncement. He reached out and pulled her against his chest. His mouth descended on hers in a brutal kiss, so unlike the first one they shared earlier in the day. Josie let out a gasp of surprise, but that didn't stop her from returning his kiss. Her hands fisted in his shirt, pulling him closer.

"Are you sure about this?" he asked against her lips. It surprised Josie that he would be this courteous of her needs, that he would stop and make sure that this was what she wanted no one had before.

She reached up and cupped his cheek with her hand. "I've never been more sure of anything in my life, Neville," she whispered softly before wrapping her arms around his neck and pulling his head down for another kiss.

His hand slipped down to her breasts, his fingers shaking as they worked the buttons of her blouse. Josie arched into his touch. The feel of his hands seared through her clothing, burning her flesh as they slid down her body.

"Neville," she hissed out as his lips moved to her neck. Impatient to feel his skin against hers, she pulled at his shirt. With a small chuckle, he moved back enough for her to pull it over his head. He couldn't stifle the appreciative groan that tore through him as she bent down and flicked her tongue against his nipple.

Somehow, they made their way across the room to one of the beds. Josie dropped down as soon as the back of her knees met the mattress, pulling Neville along with her. He sat up above her and tugged at the waistband of her shorts. Josie raised her hips, and he slowly pulled them down. As soon as they were off, Josie sat up on the bed, reaching for the clasp of his jeans.

She sucked in a harsh breath as he pushed them down over his own hips. He was beautiful. Simply beautiful. From his broad shoulders to his tapered waist, with a small smattering of hair dusted across his chest, and the hard, jutting erection nestled between his legs. With deft fingers, he reach around her and unhooked her bra, leaving her just as naked.

Neville pressed his lips against hers, pushing her against the bed as he settled his weight over her. His fingers trailed down her body, and she felt him cup her breasts, one in each hand, as his mouth trailed down her neck. He took one taut peak into his mouth, slowly sliding his tongue around it. Josie arched into his mouth, her fingers spearing through his hair.

Neville's hands pushed down her body, sliding down over her stomach until he reached the apex of her thighs. Slowly he eased his fingers between them, stroking the inside curve. Josie pushed up against his hand, and he rewarded her by slowly running the pad of his index finger against her clit.

"Please, Neville," she panted, pulling at his hair. "Don't wait."

"Josie... I want I want to make this good for you," he panted against the column of her throat.

She reached down and slowly stroked against his length. "It's already better than good, Neville. Now. Please."

Neville brought his mouth down on hers, settling his weight above her. Josie arched up against him, feeling the length of his cock brush against her. Josie released a shuddering sigh of pleasure as he eased into her. Her hands slid down the strong planes of his back as she tilted her hips up to meet his slow thrusts.

"All of you," she moaned against his ear. "I want all of you."

He ground his hips against her, driving into her with a slow steady pace. Josie hooked her ankles around his hips, pushing her hips off the bed in an effort to take him as deep as possible.

"Mine," he grunted out, surging into her.

Josie clawed at his back, trying to urge him on faster, relishing the feel of him inside her. She was so close, had been close to this edge since he'd first kissed her. Neville dropped his head to her shoulder and lightly bit it. He picked up the pace, pulling nearly out only to drive back into her again.

"Yes," Josie gasped out. "Please, Neville, please."

Grabbing at her hips, he thrust harder, feeling her inner walls shudder around him. His pattern became erratic, and Josie arched up against him, determined to push him to the brink. With one last kiss, his pushed into her again, the power of his release making his entire body shake. Josie wrapped her arms and legs around him, holding him close as he came inside of her.

"Mine," he growled against her throat.

"Yours," she agreed with a sleepy sigh.

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**April 29, 2005**

*Bryce Canyon, Utah*

"I can't believe I let you talk me into this," Josie hissed out, reaching above her head to grasp the rock as she hoisted herself upwards. She could feel Neville's hands cupping her ass as he pushed her up, and had she not been hanging from a rope forty feet off the ground, she might have enjoyed his hand placement a bit more.

"As if," he grunted, pushing upward, "this is any worse than the bungee jumping thing you talked me into."

"Hey, that was a controlled adventure, there was no sweating involved, and definitely no climbing up the side of a mountain with only sheer strength and a thin rope," she panted. Her foot scraped along the side of the rock as she pulled herself up to the edge.

"Ha," Neville snorted, scrambling up after her. "No sweating involved? Somehow, I don't see jumping off a bloody building as an adventure with no sweating involved."

"In technical terms it is. You needn't climb all the way up to the top of the building, and the way down is a breeze. This is nowhere near as easy not only will do we have to climb up, but we have to scramble all the way down again."

"True but isn't this view worth it?" he asked, plopping down on the rocky edge beside her.

"The view might be spectacular, Brit boy, but I'm still not at all convinced the climb down will be worth it."

"How about the company, then?"

Josie pulled a bottle of water from her side holster, popped the top open, and took a long drink. She wiped the back of her arm across her lips as she handed the bottle to Neville. He took it, his eyes sparkling with mischief.

"You're not going to answer me, are you?"

He lifted the bottle to his lips, and Josie's eyes were drawn to the column of his throat. Her mouth felt suspiciously dry as she watched his throat work; unconsciously, she licked her lips. His lips lifted in a smug smile.

"If you're in the mood for that," he said in a husky voice, "I think we should probably head down again. I think it would be quite uncomfortable to do that here unless you're feeling dangerous, that is?"

"Do you honestly think I'll be up to that? After you put me through this? There are muscles I didn't even know existed that are sore right now, Longbottom."

He leaned in close to her, his warm breath fanning across her cheek as he whispered: "I could always soothe those aches for you."

Josie turned her head towards his. "You are completely incorrigible," she whispered back before letting her lips meet his.

His face was nicely flushed when she pulled back.

"I think I'm ready to head down," she told him in a husky voice. She rolled over onto her belly and slowly pushed down off the side. "Don't take too long in getting down; I might not be in the mood later."

Neville watched her slide down the edge and pulled on the rope to inch down.

"You're a tease, Josie Rutledge," he yelled out, just before following her down over the edge.

On the way down the belay anchor securing Josie to the rock face failed, causing the belay gadget to pull taut just before it too failed. Josie felt the harness tug at her body, and she jerked a bit, her waist taking the brunt of the bruising blow. One minute she was following Neville down the face of the cliff, the next she was falling through the air. It barely took a second. She landed badly on her side, the force of it knocking the wind from her.

"Josie." Neville's strong voice broke through the hazy fog of pain. "Josie, listen to me."

Josie tried to focus on the sound of his voice, but every part of her body ached. She could feel him tugging at the harness, and she bit back a sharp gasp of pain as he removed it from her.

"I know it hurts, baby," Neville said. It sounded like a whisper to Josie, he sounded so very far away.

"Josie!" he shouted. "I need you to stay awake." She felt his fingers on her jaw, tilting her face towards him. "Your body is going into shock."

Everything felt cold, and all Josie wanted to do was close her eyes and sleep. Maybe then the pain would stop.

"Josie damn it, Josie stay awake," Neville hissed. She could hear him searching through his backpack for something she wondered idly if he had brought a cell phone.

"I need you to drink this, Josie," he said in a ragged voice, pressing something against her lips. "Drink this for me, luv it will help." A thick liquid filled her mouth, burning it. She tried to turn her head away but Neville held her still, forcing the stuff down her throat. "Shush, baby, I know it's horrible stuff, but it will help," he whispered close to her ear.

"Hurts..." she gasped out, as soon as he lowered the bottle.

Neville brush his hand against her cheek. "I'm sorry, luv so sorry," he choked out. His hands brushed down her body, and Josie grunted as his fingers probed along her rib cage.

"Josie, hon, your ribs are cracked I think they might be broken, and I think you've damaged your spine. I don't " he broke off with a sob. "I don't know if there's any internal bleeding."

Josie vaguely heard him riffling through his backpack again. It was such an effort to stay awake she wanted nothing more than to fall into the blackness.

"Josie!" Neville's fingers dug into her chin. "Josie, you need to stay awake. I need Josie, do you trust me?" Josie's eyes focused on his face, and she wondered why he was crying.

"Please, Josie," he sobbed. "Do you trust me?"

"...trust you," she gasped out before her lids slid closed.

The next time she opened her eyes, Neville was crouched above her. He clutched a long slender stick in his right hand while chanting something in a low voice. It sounded vaguely like Latin. Josie wanted to laugh; he looked so silly, standing above her with such an expression of hard concentration on his face.

He noticed her eyes on him. "Everything will be all right in a moment, luv," he whispered as he ran the stick down her body.

Her brain felt foggy. Her body no longer felt as if it had been broken in two, though it tingled in a strange fashion. Her mouth was bone dry, and she licked her lips, trying to draw out some moisture.

"Wh what are you doing, Neville?" Josie asked in a raspy voice.

"Shush, luv, I can't fix everything," Neville muttered, "but I can at least make you more comfortable."

"Neville " she gasped out, "I what how are you "

"Just trust me, Josie." He placed a soft kiss to her forehead. "I promise, I'll explain everything later but right now, just trust me."

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A/N:

Okay, after a moment or two of panic over the "oh my god, someone else is using the same idea as me," thing, and well, obsessively reading the first two chapters posted, I want to point y'all to another cool rendition of The Ghost and Mrs. Muir posted by ancientgirl over on Whispers. It's actually a HG/SS fic, titled The Ghost and Mrs. Krum, and so far it's pretty good, so go on over and read it. Yeah I know... silly to be in a panic, but, yanno this is sort of my baby the fic I'm proudest of, and for some weird reason I thought only I had this idea (stupid reasoning).



ETA: I just noticed it's on here too... so run over and read it -- she's finished it now (I'm so bad I'm nowhere near done, and this last chapter was written in November). I do have chapter 11 finished though, and with Rachel so I'll post soon.

Thanks to Rachel W (who is not only a talented writer in her own right, but an incredibly cool lady with a killer southern accent) and Mark (my sick psychotic British friend who keeps trying to put a little bit of Brit into me yes I said it was little :oP) for all their help in chasing away my misuse of commas and blatant American jargon.

An informational site on what can go wrong in any given climbing situation:

<http://www.nps.gov/yose/sar/climbsafe.htm>

## Chapter 11

*Chapter 12 of 12*

Neville Longbottom has died, leaving his Muggle wife and young daughter to navigate the strange Wizarding world on their own.

**April 29, 2005**

*Bryce Canyon, Utah*

Neville gathered Josie's body in his arms; she let out a small gasp of pain, the sound of which cut through him like shards of glass.

"I'm going to take care of you," he whispered into her hair. "Everything is going to be all right."

He squeezed his eyes shut, letting his body slowly fade, picturing his destination clearly as he forced himself through the mental image. There was an audible "pop" as he disappeared from the spot he'd previously occupied, only to reappear in the lobby of L'Abbaye Saint-Feuillien hospital. A nurse, dressed in a green uniform looked up as he Apparated into the waiting room.

"What is the nature of the magical injury?" the nurse at the check in station asked.

"I'm not sure. She we were hiking, and she fell," Neville gasped out, cradling Josie in his arms.

"Name?"

"Josie Rutle... er Longbottom. Josie Longbottom."

"Why don't you place her on that gurney over there." The nurse waved her hand at the line of gurneys against the far left wall. Neville hesitated. "Oh, do set her down before you injure yourself as well," the nurse snapped.

"Yes, Ma'am," he mumbled, staggering over to the wall. Neville placed Josie down on the wheeled bed and smoothed the hair back from her sweaty, tear-stained face.

"Was there any magic involved in the event? Any spell that might have gone awry?"

"No."

"Was she given any potions?"

"I gave her a general pain relieving draught as soon as I was able to get to where she fell," Neville said tiredly. "I didn't know it would cause this sort of reaction I thought our potions were safe for Muggle consumption."

"She's a Muggle?" The nurse gave him a shocked look. "You can't just go around giving out potions to Muggles; it's just not done."

Neville turned pale at her words. "But she's ah, she's my wife."

"Just because she's your wife doesn't mean that she's able to ingest a magical potion," the nurse said with an exasperated air. "Why do you think there are regulations preventing this sort of thing? Muggles can sometimes have strange allergic reactions to certain potion ingredients; that's why every magical medical facility runs an allergen spell on any Muggle relations." She moved around the desk, brandishing her wand. "Do you have any idea what sort of harm you might have caused?"

"Harm?" he gasped out. "You mean I've hurt her more? But... you can help her, can't you?" He watched as the nurse moved the wand through the air above Josie's prone body. "Please, tell me you can help her."

"Only time will tell, Mr. Longbottom."

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**May 4, 2005**

*L'Abbaye Saint-Feuillien Hospital, Utah*

Josie slowly opened her eyes, blinking at the harsh glow of light coming from the door to her left.

"Ah, you're awake now," a voice said from the right.

Josie blinked hard, trying to adjust her eyes as she focused on a redheaded figure in a long green dress.

"You've been out for some time," the redhead said, bending over her. Josie tried to push herself up.

"No, no, no, you really shouldn't get up just yet. You've had a nasty fall, Mrs. Longbottom, as well as a severe allergic reaction to the potion your husband gave you, so it's best if you just lay there.

"Water..." Josie rasped out, closing her eyes. The light still hurt her eyes, though not as much as before. A glass of water was pressed against her lips; water trickled down her throat.

"Where am I?" Josie asked in a stronger voice, once the nurse removed the cup.

"You're at Saint-Feuillien Hospital; your husband Apparated you here almost immediately after your fall."

"He... what?" Josie asked, not understanding. "I'm sorry... I think there's been some sort of mistake." She struggled to sit up again.

"Hold still, Mrs. Longbottom," the nurse said in a firm voice, trying to push her back onto the bed. "I need to run a diagnostic spell; you've had it pretty nasty the last couple of days. Once I've finished the spell, I'm sure the Healer Brimshaw will want a word or two with you." The nurse muttered a Latin phrase, and Josie found herself pinned to the bed, unable to sit up.

Josie struggled against the invisible constraints, blanching white as the crazy woman brought out a long thin stick. "Let me up," Josie whimpered, trying to twist her body. She watched with horrid fascination as the tip started to glow as the woman muttered a litany of strange Latin-sounding words while passing the stick up and down over her prone body. "Let me up please; I don't want to you to do this."

"Are you refusing treatment?" the nurse asked in a huff. "Seriously, what is wrong with you Muggle types? I'm not hurting you, now am I?" She pulled back her wand and glanced down at Josie's frightened face. "Really, there's no need to get all panicky. I do realize that you're not used to the diagnostic spells, since these aren't taught to the general public, but honestly do you think they'd harm you?"

"Please," Josie sobbed, tears streaming down her pale cheeks. "I don't understand there's been some mistake! Let me up please. Don't make me stay trapped this way. I want I want to go *home*."

The woman looked at her for a moment then walked to the door. She spoke to someone just outside of the entrance, though Josie couldn't see whom from where she was at. A minute later, the nurse nodded and pulled back into the room.

"Your husband will be here in a minute, Mrs. Longbottom, as will Healer Brimshaw," the nurse said, flicking her wand in Josie's direction. "I've removed the locking spell, but I must insist that you stay in bed. There's no telling what harm you might cause yourself in getting up without a once over from the Healer."

"I when will " The rest of Josie's words were cut off when Neville entered the room, followed by a squat, rotund little old man with a long graying beard.

"Josie, you're awake," Neville said with obvious relief. "I've been so worried. I I didn't know you were going to have an allergic reaction; I could have killed you!"

"Now, now, Mr. Longbottom, it isn't your fault at all," the squat man told him, moving to the edge of Josie's bed. "One can never quite tell how magic will affect a Muggle, even one such as your wife."

"She's been hysterical since she awoke," the nurse told older gentleman. "I tried to do the standard diagnostic spells to track her healing, and she panicked. I realize, sir, that she is a Muggle, but I would've assumed someone married to a wizard would be better prepared."

"You know better than to make those sorts of assumptions Nurse Witherspoon," reprimanded the older man. "It wouldn't surprise me in the least to learn that these two have only been married a short time. Haven't you dear?" he asked, patting Josie's hand.

Josie looked over at Neville, and he gave her a pleading look. "You have no idea," she said dryly.

"Indeed, indeed," the Healer said absently. "Now then, would you have any objection to me performing a series of detection spells? I do assure you that they will not harm you; there shan't be any allergic reaction and hardly any discomfort."

"It will be all right. I do promise," Neville assured her, reaching for her hand. Josie pulled her fingers from his warm grasp, refusing to meet his eye.

"Will I be able to go home once you're finished?" she asked the healer.

"Baring any problems, I shouldn't see why not. Your husband looks quite capable of monitoring your condition and meting out any required potions though I daresay we will run an allergy spell on you to make sure we don't cause another potion's mishap."

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**May 4, 2005**

*L'Abbaye Saint-Feuillien Hospital, Utah*

"Here you are, sir; please sign at the bottom of the release form, notarizing that you are aware of what precautions your wife must take for the next week or so." The hospital administrator flipped through another packet of papers. "Here is the form authorizing the release of funds from Gringotts to Saint-Feuillien for treatment expenses." She handed Neville another packet of papers. "And finally, here is the apothecary prescription. Mrs. Longbottom will need to take the first three potions twice a day for the next two weeks and the fourth potion once a day for the rest of the month. They aren't as effective as the normal run of the mill potions, but given her allergic reactions, these will be much safer for her to ingest."

"Anything else I should know?" Neville asked, stealing a quick glance over to where Josie sat.

"She should avoid Apparating and traveling by Floo for good measure, at least for the next week or so. If you need transport from the hospital, we do have low impact Portkeys leaving to various destinations every other hour in the lobby, for a small fee. These were specifically designed not to jostle patients around who are in no condition to Floo or Apparate, so there shouldn't be any problems for her if you chose this option."

"Thank you, you've been most helpful," Neville muttered, gathering up the various forms.

"You know that is if you don't mind me saying..." the woman started. "You two don't seem to have been married long, give her a bit of time. My dad was this way, too, when he found out Mom was a witch. Completely shell-shocked for a while. If she loves you, she'll come around."

*If she loves me*, he thought to himself, rolling the packet of papers up. "Thank you," Neville told her once more, giving the woman a wry smile. "I'll keep that under advisement."

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**May 4, 2005**

*L'Abbaye Saint-Feuillien Hospital, Utah*

The lobby the administrator indicated turned out to be nothing more than a long hallway with benches and plush chairs pushed against the wall for those waiting. The room was empty, a fact that pleased Josie to no end; she was in no mood to deal with more of *them*. She sat down in one of the chairs, refusing to look at Neville as he pulled another chair over to where she sat.

"You lied to them," Josie stated baldly, breaking the silence.

Neville reached out for her hand, but she pulled it from him. "Yes," he answered dully.

"And you've been lying to me."

"No, Josie, I haven't. I've never lied to you."

"Really?" she asked with a strangled sob. "And you claim keeping all *this*," she waved her hand in the air, "a secret wasn't a lie by omission? I don't even know you."

"I haven't lied to you," his whispered, reaching out to touch her face. "I am me. All *this* doesn't change who I am."

Josie turned her face from him. "It might not change who you are, Neville, but you can't change the fact that I don't know you, not really. What other things have you kept from me? How can I trust you when I've shared everything but you haven't?"

"I had to lie to them. I need you to understand; they these people wouldn't have helped you had I not told them you were my wife," Neville said softly. "It's not as if I enjoyed lying to them, but I couldn't very well take you to a Muggle hospital, not in the state you were in!"

Josie sighed. "It isn't the fact that you lied to them, Neville. You lied to me! You deliberately kept a part of yourself from me, a very important part of yourself I might add, and you expect me to be okay with that?"

"Josie," he hissed out. "I never, ever lied to you. Yes, there are certain things I kept from you, but I had to if you would just let me explain."

"I thought..." She looked up into his face. "I suppose it really doesn't matter what I thought now, does it? Obviously I was wrong; so very wrong." Josie looked down at her lap, her hands smoothing down an imaginary crease as she tried to control her feelings. "I want to go home," she said quietly, after a moment. "I think it's best if you let me leave alone. I... I can't do this right now."

"That isn't such a good idea, Josie."

"Probably not, but it's what I want," Josie told him firmly. "I need... I need some time to think."

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**May 6, 2005**

*Henderson, Nevada*

"I'm sorry, Neville, but Josie isn't in any position to talk to you right now," Sarah said through the apartment door.

"Can't I just come in and see her?" Neville asked.

"No, Neville, you can't. Just go on home."

"Damn it, Sarah, let me in let me see with my own eyes that she's all right."

Sarah opened the door just a crack and caught Neville's eye. "Neville, if you don't leave right now, I'm calling the cops. You cannot come in to see Josie, I've already told you she is in no position to talk to you. She is recovering from whatever *you* did to her. So just go."

"I didn't do anything to her, Sarah!" Neville snapped, trying to push the door open. It snagged on the chain. "You have got to let me see her, please, Sarah, let me see her!"

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**May 7, 2005**

*Henderson, Nevada*

"Sarah, open the door," Neville shouted, pounding on the apartment door.

"Go away, Neville. Josie doesn't want to talk to you."

"She told you that? She doesn't want to see me?"

"You're not seeing her," Sarah yelled through the door. "Just go away. You've done enough damage already."

"Damn it, Sarah, open the door!"

She yanked it open and glared at him through the screen door.

"Look, Neville, I can't pretend to understand everything that happened between you and Josie this last week; she won't talk about it. All she asks is that I and everyone else leave her alone, that she needs time to think," Sarah said through the door screen. "I'd let you in if I honestly thought it would do any good, but it won't. She was the same way after her parents died. Give her the space she needs."

"But, Sarah, I have to talk to her I have to explain," he responded, shoving a hand through his hair.

"Explain?" Sarah asked, arching an eyebrow. "What exactly is it you *need* to explain? You aren't married, are you?" She narrowed her eyes at him. "What did you do to her, Neville?"

"Nothing everything it's complicated. Please, Sarah, just let me in to talk to her."

"Okay, so tell me, and I'll tell her." Sarah rested her hip against the doorframe and watched Neville's face.

"I can't it's I just can't," he said softly, stepping back from the door.

"Why?"

"What do you mean, why?" he asked, a confused expression flitting across his face.

"Why should I let you talk to her? Why should I let you go off and explain all these mysterious reasons to her when you can't tell them to me first? Give me one good reason why I should let you anywhere near her, Neville."

"Sarah..." He scrubbed a hand over his weary face. "I need her," he said after a moment.

"That's it?" Sarah asked, her voice full of vitriol. "You *need* her?"

"She's everything. Please, Sarah, let me talk to her I'm begging you," Neville said softly.

They stared at one another through the screen door until Sarah turned away. He stood in the doorway, not daring to hope that she might actually bring Josie to the door. His spirits sank as Sarah reappeared in the doorway. She gave him a long, measured look.

"She's not here," Sarah finally said.

Neville opened his mouth to ask where, but Sarah went on. "Josie's gone up north, north-west to be exact. She went to the cabin her grandparents left her, up near Portland, Oregon. I don't know when she'll be back."

"She's gone?" he repeated dully.

Sarah pulled open the screen door and shoved an envelop into his hands. "Don't tell her I gave you this. If you hurry, you can probably make it up there in a day or two." Neville looked up at her with an expression of gratitude.

"I I don't know how to thank "

"You can thank me by fixing this mess you made," she interrupted him. "Don't make me regret this."

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A/N:

I can't tell you how many times I've written, erased, and started again on this chapter! I'm still not 100% happy with it, but it's a lot better than its predecessors. As always I'd like to thank Rachel W (whose arm I twisted so she'd stop doing so much homework and beta this chapter for me) and Andy for looking over this chapter. I'm horrible with commas and Americanisms. All fubar portions are solely my own.