

To Be Her Champion

by Good_Witch

Neville and Luna get closer during the Christmas holiday in Neville's 7th year. In the face of war, they take comfort in each other—both in bed and in their hearts.

1: Getting Closer, 2: Joined

Chapter 1 of 1

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Author's Note: This was written for the InterHouse Fest on Livejournal, 2010, where it was posted in two parts. This is the complete story in one part.

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I've taken the liberty of shifting canon timing from Death Eaters kidnapping Luna on her way home for the Christmas holiday to kidnapping her on her way back to Hogwarts from holiday. Just a couple of weeks shift... no biggie, right? :D

To Be Her Champion

Neville sat, staring out the window into the grey wintry landscape. Every so often he would sigh, his warm breath fogging the glass for a moment before fading again. As the early dusk approached, his grandmother stepped up behind him and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"You've been sitting there for hours, love. What's wrong?"

Heaving another sigh, Neville twisted, patting her hand on his shoulder, and said, "A little bit of everything, Gran. You know what school's like this year, and the war..." He paused to exchange a sombre look with her, then grimaced sheepishly as he added, "And, what with Harry and Ron and Hermione gone, I'm just lonely."

Augusta Longbottom circled around and settled across from Neville. "But you have other friends..."

Neville interrupted, smiling faintly, "I know. But, the girls are only in sixth year, so we don't have classes together or anything. And Luna's in Ravenclaw anyway, so it's even harder to spend time together. Besides, the Carrows and Filch do everything they can to keep students from congregating...they've taken a page from Umbridge's book on that score."

Augusta sighed as well, then smirked impishly. "Well, that certainly didn't stop you three from breaking into the headmaster's office! How did you arrange that, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

Neville grinned at the memory, warmed by his grandmother's obvious approval. "If you can keep a secret..."

"Of course I can!" She straightened primly with an arch sniff. Then, flicking a glance around, even though they were the only two people there, she leant forward and said, "Go on; tell me."

Neville sat back, shoving his hand into his trouser pocket. Lips spread in a mischievous grin, he brandished a coin at her. "We use this!"

Augusta frowned in confusion. "What, you pay someone to deliver a message?"

Neville chuckled and bent closer to her, tilting it toward the light. "No. Look. It's not a real Galleon. Hermione made them for us in fifth year. They're linked by a Protean Charm." Augusta's brow furrowed more, and Neville remembered what McGonagall had said about Gran's charms skills, so he hastily added, "They're all linked, and Harry or Hermione would change the numbers around the edge to the date and time of our next meeting."

"I see. And those were the Defence meetings you told me about?"

"Exactly. Well, *this* year, Luna did a little charm work herself and adjusted it so we could send more than just a few numbers, and so we could choose which coin we sent to. She fixed it so we could write out our messages and then use a copying spell to transfer them to the coin, which would then transmit it to another coin, where the other person would use a copying spell to take the message from the coin and transfer it to parchment again! Really brilliant, if you ask me."

Augusta shrugged vaguely. "Well, she *is* in Ravenclaw."

Neville nodded fondly. "Luna and Ginny and I have been corresponding this way all term, so we managed to keep our activities as clandestine as possible."

His smug smirk was echoed in Augusta's proud look, and she clasped his hand in hers. "Well, dear heart, why don't you just send a message to them and see if they're as lonely as you are? You know your friends are always welcome to visit here."

"Thanks, Gran. I'll do that." He surged forward and enveloped her in a hug before rising. "You're the best!"

Augusta smiled after his retreating form, smoothing the hair mussed from his embrace. To herself, she said, "I try."

Luna was sitting in her room, making a necklace of dirigible plums to match her earrings when she felt her pocket warm. Fishing out the fake Galleon, she stretched out on her bed with a leaf of parchment and her wand. The coin showed the dense coiling line that indicated a letter, along with the code number assigned to Neville. Smiling, she cast the copying charm, watching Neville's familiar scrawl spilling over the page.

Hello, Luna and Ginny!

I know it's only two days since we came home for the holiday, but...I don't know about you lot...I'm bored out of my skull over here, with just me and Gran! She told me you're both welcome to visit any time, and I figured I'd invite you over, so maybe you could help keep me from going mad with boredom. I've got a really nice greenhouse...even if it is a bit small...but I think you'd like it. Let me know if you're interested, and if so, when you might be available, and we can set something up.

I miss you two, and I can't help but worry that something awful will happen before we get back to Hogwarts where I can keep an eye on you again. (And you know I mean that in the nicest way possible!)

I look forward to hearing from you. And if we don't manage to get together while we're on holiday, I'll see you back at school in a couple of weeks.

Cheers!

Neville

Luna sprang up from her bed and raced down the spiral staircase to her father. "Dad! Neville's invited me and Ginny over to visit. I'd love to go. Will you let me?"

Xenophilius Lovegood turned to look at his daughter's bright, eager face and sighed. "I don't know that I want you off gadding about in these dangerous times..."

Luna broke in, "But, Dad, I'll be at the Longbottoms' house, and they're Purebloods, so I don't think they'll be targeted. Besides, you know we can defend ourselves. We did pretty well two years ago. Please, Dad? I love being here with you, but I miss my friends. In times like these, it's our bonds of friendship and love that sustain us against the dark."

Xeno stared at Luna, taken aback by the wisdom of her statement. She always did manage to see the piercing truth of things. Now that she was seventeen, having just celebrated her birthday a few weeks before, he knew she didn't really have to ask permission. But, being the good, loving daughter that she was, he knew she wouldn't rebel if he said no. That was why he eventually nodded his assent, even though his heart thumped in fear that something would happen to the light of his life.

Luna flung her arms around him, crowing in delight. "Thank you! I'll write to Neville right away. Maybe Ginny will be available to go over at the same time..."

Her voice trailed behind her as she dashed back up the stairs to her room. Xeno stared unseeingly at the ceiling, his expression grim and anxious. Then, he gave himself a shake and sucked in a deep breath. "Take a brace, old chap. You're worrying too much. Nothing will happen to her at the Longbottoms'. Now, get back to work! These papers won't write themselves..."

A few days after Neville's initial message, Christmas Eve day, both Luna and Ginny visited him at home. They spent a pleasant afternoon touring his greenhouse and taking a walk around the house in the brisk December sunlight until the sun sank beyond the trees, sending them inside to warm up with cocoa and biscuits. Before it was time for them to leave, Ginny regretfully told them that the Weasleys were going to visit round at various relatives' homes for the rest of break, so she wouldn't be able to come again. But, she added, with a hug for both Neville and Luna, she had a wonderful time and was very glad Neville had invited her.

Once she had gone, Luna turned to Neville and said, "I had a wonderful time, too. And I don't think my dad will object to letting me visit again. Of course, you're welcome to come to our house, too. I can show you where we fish for freshwater plimpies and where we harvest our gurdyroots."

Neville smiled at her enthusiasm and said, "I'll ask Gran. I don't think she'll mind. I'm glad you came. I missed you."

Luna tilted her head and beamed at him. "We're always together in here, Neville." She rested a hand over her heart and added, "Friends always are."

Neville flushed a little and ducked his head. "Yeah, well, friends-in-there can't hug you when you need it." He peered up at her through his lashes and she laughed, closing the distance between them and wrapping her arms around his waist. Squeezing her in return, he said, "Be careful out there, you hear? I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to you."

Luna stepped back and tossed powder into the Floo. "I will. Take care, Neville. I'll see you soon."

"Bye." He watched her spin out of sight in the green flames, then went straight to his grandmother to arrange his visit to the Lovegoods.

Neville Flooded to the Lovegoods' house a few days later, eyes wide at the unusual nature of their home. He was unfailingly polite to Xenophilius, who was rather officious with him until he saw for himself how kind Neville was to Luna and to him. Then he retreated into the background and let Luna take Neville around the house and grounds, dragging him by the hand when he didn't keep up fast enough.

The hand-painted signs in the yard made Neville smile, but when he saw the painting of Harry, Ron, Hermione, Ginny, and...most importantly...himself on Luna's ceiling, he was struck dumb with awe, a lump lodging in his throat at the loving detail in the pictures.

He was staring, owl-eyed, at his image when Luna tilted her head and said, "Hmm, I should update it. You've grown up a lot since I painted that." Neville blinked at her and blushed. Twinkling at him, she added, "And it certainly doesn't have such a becoming blush..."

Neville grimaced at her and spun away, her trilling laughter making him flush even more. He was facing her bed, and inspiration struck as he looked at the pillows piled at the top. Snatching one, he whirled and swiped at her, missing only because she managed to duck out of the way. Luna, surprised yet delighted at the silly attack, dodged past him and grabbed another pillow, swinging at him in retaliation.

A breathless pillow fight ensued, with shrieks of laughter and grunts as pillows impacted on them. At one point, Luna's pillow burst, and downy feathers spilled out of it, floating in the air on the eddying currents they created in their zeal. Soon, it looked like it was snowing inside, but they were anything but cold, their cheeks pink and eyes bright with exertion and fun.

Xeno peeked up at one point, wondering at all the noise, but disappeared without comment, smiling indulgently at their carefree play. It made things seem brighter for a little while.

Eventually, Luna conceded defeat, collapsing across her bed under a flurry of swings, her depleted pillow useless to defend herself anymore. Giggling, she cried, "I yield! I yield! You win!"

Neville flopped alongside her, his pillow held across her, pinning her to the bed. Bits of down and feathers were stuck all over their faces and hair and clothing. Grinning, Neville said, "Maybe you should paint me like this...the Pillow Fight Champion!"

Luna met his gaze and studied him, her laughter fading as she stared, leaving him disconcerted. After a long moment of charged silence, Luna extricated one arm and lifted her hand to his face, gently plucking down from his hairline and eyebrow, then brushing some from his lips. "I don't think I'd want the feathers on you. "

Neville froze, barely breathing as she touched him. When her fingertips lightly grazed over his lips, he gasped, fighting the urge to nip at them. Luna let her hand drop again and smiled up at him. Neville released the pillow and sat back, offering his hand to pull her up. Luna sat up, her tousled hair falling into her face. Quickly, he reached out and smoothed it back behind her ear, removing some feathers as he went.

Luna tilted her head again and murmured, "Thanks." Neville nodded, and they gazed mutely at each other for a moment before Neville looked away, abashed. Luna inhaled, turned her attention to her *be-fowled* bedroom, and chuckled. "I better clean this up."

"I'll help you." They stood, wands out, and directed the down and feathers back into the pillow, sealing it up again when they were done. Neville felt much more himself after focusing on the task, and they headed downstairs for tea.

It was well into the evening when Neville said, "I really should get back home. I don't like Gran being alone; it's bad enough when I'm at school."

Luna nodded. "The Floo powder is in that little pot on the mantle."

Neville bit his lip and said, "Actually, I'm going to Apparate back home. I want to practice. You never know when you might need to pop away quickly, what with Death Eaters running rampant."

Luna inclined her head gravely. "Come on. We can use the garden."

Neville bade her father goodbye and followed her outside. She led him past some bushes and into the trees, out of sight of the house. Unsure where they were going, Neville said, "Uh, Luna, as long as you don't have Anti-Apparition spells on the house, I could have just gone from in there."

Luna ducked behind a tree and stopped, and when Neville stepped around after her, she pulled him close into an embrace, pressing her cheek against his chest. Neville's startled, "Oh!" was countered by Luna saying, "I just wanted some privacy to say goodbye."

Neville tentatively returned her hug, then peered down at her when she pulled back and lifted her face to his. His heart was beating faster at her possible meaning, but he didn't want to make any rash assumptions and ruin their friendship. Offering a tremulous smile, he said, "Hey, it's not goodbye, right? You said friends are always together..."

He trailed off and Luna backed away, placing her hand against his chest. "In here. Yes." Her brow furrowed and she tilted her head, a move that was becoming more familiar and endearing to him every time she did it, and said, "Your heart is beating so fast."

Neville swallowed, unable to think of a response. He merely stared at her. There was a pregnant pause, then Luna stepped back, dropping her hand to her side. "Would you like to come here next time, or should I visit you?"

Neville blinked rapidly, trying to shake off the feeling of "impending." Exhaling a plume of vapour, he said, "I daresay it's my turn next time. I'll write when I know more."

Luna smiled. "I'll be waiting." There was another beat of silence, then she said, "Goodnight, Neville."

"Goodnight, Luna." He watched her strolling back toward the house, trying to compose himself enough to concentrate on Apparating. It wouldn't do to splinch or have to return to the Lovegoods' to ask to use the Floo.

After several deep breaths with his eyes closed, regaining control and a calm awareness of himself, he focused on the three Ds and safely Apparated home.

It was only two days later when Luna visited the Longbottoms again. It was both a relief and nerve-wracking that Ginny wasn't there to leaven the heavy silences and awkward glances between the two of them. While Neville's gut twisted at every piercing gaze from Luna, making him wish for the easy camaraderie of the three of them, another part of him liked being the sole focus of Luna's attention, particularly as it seemed that her attention had taken a decidedly more personal bent.

They spent much of the afternoon lounging inside the greenhouse...it was nice and warm in there...just talking of everything from cabbages to kings. If Luna ended up sitting closer than was strictly necessary beside Neville, occasionally leaning her head against his shoulder, Neville didn't pull away, so nothing was said about it.

Two days later, New Year's Eve day, Neville Apparated to the Lovegoods' garden, beaming at the sight of Luna tilting her head and smiling up at him. This time, after she hugged him in welcome, she slid her hand down his arm to twine her fingers in his, and he didn't retreat. And when it was time for him to leave, and she led him to that tree again, he embraced her first.

The next day, Neville asked her if she wanted to come over, and she agreed instantly. Neither of them could think of anything else they would like better than to start off the new year spending time with each other. They only had a few days left before heading back to Hogwarts, and they were loath to go back to the stressful castle where they'd be back to using the coins and having only fleeting passes in the corridors or the Great Hall.

There had been a snowfall the night before, to ring in the new year, and Neville and Luna spent the afternoon outside building snowmen and snow forts for their planned snowball fight. After the allotted time in which they amassed as many snowballs as they could make, they eyed each other over their battlements and cried, "Charge!"

While Neville pelted her fort with a continual barrage of snowballs, Luna hunkered down and used her wand to levitate several at once, which she then sent across the battlefield to rain down upon Neville's head. His surprised yelp was muffled by a mouthful of snow, and he collapsed behind the fort.

Luna crouched a moment longer, listening and waiting for his retaliatory salvo, but when nothing came sailing toward her, and she heard naught but silence, her worry led her to creep across no-man's-land to check on her friend.

Neville was lying spread-eagled on his back, lumps of splatted snowballs dotting his supine form. Luna, afraid that she had accidentally hurt him, rushed forward and dropped to her knees beside him, brushing snow from his face and saying, "I'm sorry! Are you all right? Did I hurt you?"

She never saw Neville's hand...clutching a large snowball...rising up to splatter on her head as he curled forward and grabbed her about her waist, pulling her down and rolling her into the snow. Her shriek of surprise turned into a relieved laugh, and Neville joined in, chuckling as he rubbed the snow in her hair.

They tussled, breathless with laughter and their attempts to shove snow down each other's necks, until Luna, weak from giggling, couldn't struggle anymore, and she fell back on the ground, gasping, Neville's hands pinning her wrists by her head while their legs were entangled from their skirmish. She looked up at him, his cheeks scarlet from cold, his hair wet and messy, and his eyes sparkling with mirth, and became very aware of how close he was.

Neville saw the change in her expression, and watched her pupils dilate as she gazed at him. Feeling his heart thumping again, and not from their wrestling, he murmured, "Maybe you should paint me like this...Snowball Fight Champion."

Luna licked her lips and moved her hands, which made Neville release her wrists immediately, eyes wide. She reached up and smoothed his hair, knocking some snow off the ends and making him shudder. One corner of her mouth quirked up, she lifted one knee and turned, shoving him onto his back and hovering over him instead. Her icy hair fell forward and she tucked it back. Her voice was low as she said, "No, I think I'd rather paint you like this..."

On the tail of her words, she leant down, her warm breath ghosting over his lips as she inched closer. Neville's heart was beating quite fast, and he felt a bit dizzy. Then, when the softness of her lips touched his, his eyes closed in pleasure.

The kiss was gentle, tentative. But when Luna felt Neville responding, she pressed a little more firmly. Neville's hand slid into her hair behind her ear, guiding her to tilt her head as he tilted the other way. She settled against him, and his other hand travelled along her back in soft caresses. It was instinctive for them to part their lips, seeking to taste each other, and the moment he felt the touch of her tongue, Neville moaned.

Time seemed to have stopped as they lay there on the freezing ground, their kiss deepening more and more. As cold as it was, Neville didn't feel it. Heat washed over him from head to toe and back again, taking wild, swirling detours in his groin and gut until he backed away, gasping and panicking that Luna would feel his erection twitching between them.

Luna licked her lips again and simply gazed into his eyes, hers dark and inviting. Afraid of moving too fast, Neville rasped, "Why don't we get dried off and warm up?"

Luna smiled and tilted, "Hmm, I rather like the way you warm me up."

Neville's cock gave a forceful jump, and he closed his eyes, sucking in a breath. "What if Gran comes out?" He opened his eyes to see her disappointed expression and said, "Let's just go into the greenhouse."

Luna sighed and nodded, backing away and shoving to her feet. Neville carefully sat up, trying not to pinch his erection, and staggered to his feet, gesturing for her to precede him. He didn't want her to possibly see any telltale bulge. As soon as she was in front of him, he furtively adjusted his trousers, willing his arousal to go away.

They both heaved relieved sighs as they entered the steamy warmth of the greenhouse, realizing just how chilled they really were from the snow. Feeling a bit shy after their unexpected snog, they were very businesslike as they dried their scarves and hair and gloves, rubbing their hands together to heat their frigid fingers. Not much later, they retreated to the house for tea, then Luna got ready to depart.

Standing in front of the hearth, Luna said, "Will you come over tomorrow?"

Neville flushed and said, "Sure, I'll come over if you want."

Luna caught his gaze and held it as she murmured, "Oh, I want. Definitely."

Neville blinked, taken aback by her implication. She stepped forward and hugged him. He held her tightly, not really surprised when she lifted her face to his and stretched up to kiss him. Heat once again raced through him, but he cut things short before they could devolve like they had outside. Pulling back, he breathed, "I'll be there."

Luna released him and nodded. Tapping her chest lightly, she said, "I'll miss you," and flooded away.

Neville stood there, staring at the fire for a long while. Finally, he sought out his grandmother and told her he'd be gone the next day.

Neville was surprised to feel his DA coin heat up late that night. He wasn't surprised, however, that, if anyone was sending him a message that late, it was Luna. He had already got ready for bed, and was moments away from settling in, or he wouldn't have known the message was there until the next morning. He doused all but his bedside lamp, then changed into his pyjamas, grabbed a parchment and his wand, and slid under the covers. Luna's letter had his eyes widening and his cheeks flushing. But that wasn't all. Some of her words had his gut twisting and his cock swelling. She had made it very clear how she felt and what she wanted.

His heart seemed to stutter every time he read, *I really enjoyed our kiss in the snow. And I want more. Don't think you have to hold back, Neville. I don't think anything you could do would move too fast or go beyond what I would like. I can't wait to see you tomorrow. I'll be dreaming of you tonight.*

When he finally shoved the letter under his pillow and doused the remaining lamp, he lay in the darkness, letting his memories and his imagination run wild. And for the first time, he wanked himself to sleep with the thought of a girl he actually knew filling his mind.

The next day, Neville Apparated to the Lovegoods' garden, and Luna jumped up from the front step, nearly bowling him over with her enthusiastic embrace. Neville hugged her tight, but he cleared his throat when he saw Xeno watching them from the front door, and backed away nervously.

Luna looked up at him, a puzzled frown creasing her brow, but when he nodded to her father, she spun and sighed, letting her hand slide down Neville's arm to twine her fingers in his. "Dad, we're going to take a walk down the creek. We'll be back in time for tea."

Xeno peered intently at them for a moment, then nodded slowly, his shoulders slumping and giving him a melancholy air. "Be careful, Luna. You, too, Neville."

Neville nodded, glancing around for any sign of possible danger, but the snowy woods were as serene as usual. Luna tugged on his hand, leading him away from the house. When they reached the tree where they usually said goodbye, Luna backed against it, pulling Neville against her and stretching up to kiss him fiercely.

After several minutes of heated snogging, she broke away and breathed, "I missed you."

Neville, trying to even out his breathing, rested his forehead against hers and murmured, "Luna... that letter you sent last night..."

She backed away and locked gazes with him, her silver-grey eyes nearly drowned by the black of her dilated pupils. "I had to tell you. We don't have much time."

Scowling in confusion, Neville caressed her arms and said, "What do you mean? We leave for Hogwarts in a couple of days, but we can still see each other there."

Luna shook her head vehemently, her expression solemn. "I don't think so. Call it prescience if you like, but I've got this feeling that I won't be back at Hogwarts when you are."

A chill ran down Neville's spine, prickling the hairs on the back of his neck. "That's silly; I'm sure you'll be fine. We all will."

Luna tilted her head, her eyes shadowed with the knowledge that his words were empty attempts at comfort, as the reality of their world was truly dangerous, and their futures uncertain. Neville's gut clenched at the endearing gesture, and panic fluttered through him at the thought of losing her. Spurred by the intensity of the feeling, he wrapped her tightly in his embrace and rested his cheek on the top of her head, kissing her tousled hair.

They stood that way for a long time, feeling their heartbeats sync. Eventually, Luna lifted her head and pressed a gentle kiss on Neville's lips before saying, "I just want to be with you as much as possible... just in case."

Neville swallowed at the lump that rose in his throat. "I'm here, aren't I? And I'm always in here," he said as he rested his hand over her heart, gazing into her wistful eyes.

Luna covered his hand with hers and guided it lower, to cup her breast. Neville gasped. She reached for his other hand and repeated her action, holding his hands to her breasts as she closed her eyes and leant toward him trustingly.

Tendrils of fiery arousal enveloped him like Devil's Snare, and he ducked his head to kiss her, gently squeezing, feeling her tight nipples through her layers of clothing. Luna's hands left his to slide around his waist, then dipped lower to grip his arse and pull him close. Neville groaned and bent his head to kiss her again, knowing she could feel his burgeoning erection trapped between them.

After what seemed an age of snogging and groping, Neville murmured, "Luna, surely you don't want to stay out here, in the cold, in the snow..."

Luna backed away, breathing heavily. "If we go inside, we won't be able to do this."

Grimacing at the mixture of his raging desire to continue and his inner voice cautioning him to slow down, Neville said, "Maybe we should talk anyway. Everything's all so sudden."

Luna's bottom lip pushed forward in a moue of petulance, but she capitulated, saying, "Fine. We'll go talk. But I meant everything I wrote last night. And we only have today and tomorrow left."

She started toward the house, leaving Neville to follow her, scrambling to catch up. He grabbed her hand and said, "'Til we go back to school, yes."

Luna cut a sceptical look at him and said, "We'll talk."

Neville shook his head, puzzled by her cryptic rejoinder. They entered the house hand in hand, and Luna led him to the kitchen to make some cocoa. Steaming mugs in hand, they climbed the spiral stairs to her room and stretched out on the bed, backs against the headboard. Neville stared again at the painting of him on the ceiling. Taking a deep breath, he murmured, "Now, why don't you tell me why you think something bad is going to happen."

Luna wriggled closer to him, leaning her head on his shoulder and switching which hand held her mug so she could lace her fingers through his. "I had a...a dream, of sorts. I was stuck in a dark room, and I couldn't get out. There were other people there. Some came in and out, but I could never see them clearly. And there was one who just lay there in the dark, always moaning and whimpering. I wanted to help him, but I didn't know how. I felt like I was there for ages. I couldn't tell how long because I had no way of measuring time. But I missed you so much. It woke me up: the pain of missing you. I missed my dad and Ginny and others, too, but it was like a knife in the chest, how much I missed you."

Neville's face flushed at the candour of her confession, and his gut went cold at the foreboding of her dream. He squeezed her hand and turned to press a kiss to her forehead. "I'm sorry you had such a nightmare."

Luna lifted her face to his, her eyes sad. Her voice was almost non-existent as she said, "It was so *real*..."

Chest tightening with affection and worry, Neville resolutely put their mugs on the nightstand and twisted to face Luna, caging her in his arms. "I promise: I'll protect you if I can, and I'll do everything in my power to save you if... if anything bad happens."

Luna's sorrowful expression melted away, replaced with a radiant smile and eyes full of trust. "I know. You're my champion." Then she tapped her chest and added, "Always. In here."

Neville gathered her close, warmth blooming inside him and releasing euphoric tingles that made him realize *this is what love feels like*

Luna squirmed, guiding him to inch down the bed, kissing him the whole time. They were wrapped up in each other, snogging feverishly, when they were startled by Xeno's voice carrying up the stairs. "Tea's almost ready! Wash up!"

They locked glazed eyes, panting and trying to come to their senses. Luna blinked, trailing her hand down Neville's back and squeezing his arse. He stifled a groan, his eyes closing even as his hips rocked in reflex. That ground his erection against her, and she hummed in appreciation. Darting in for another kiss, Luna whispered against his lips, "We need to be alone."

Neville extricated himself from her embrace, sighing in regret. "Let's get down to tea before your father suspects."

Luna blinked at him and said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "Suspects? Oh, he already knows. Why do you think he told us to be careful?"

Neville's eyes bugged out and he choked, "He *knows*? What did you tell him?"

Luna edged off the bed, smoothing her hair and adjusting her clothes. "I didn't have to tell him anything. But he knows."

Neville watched her, the shock of her statement wilting his erection. Mortified, he cleared his throat and straightened his clothes as he followed her down the stairs.

The meal was quiet and awkward...at least to Neville. When it was over, Luna took his hand to lead him out to their Apparition tree, leaving Neville to stammer a nervous goodbye to her father on their way out. The snow crunched under their feet in the darkness, their breath sending clouds of vapour to wreath their heads as they walked.

Neville leant against the tree and Luna burrowed against him, sharing their body heat. Her voice muffled against his scarf, she said, "So, who goes where tomorrow?"

"Why don't you come over to my house?"

Luna lifted her face to lock eyes with him. "Will we be able to be alone?"

Neville's gut clenched again. He opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out.

Luna leapt into the lengthening silence with a tremulous whisper. "I'm scared. And I don't want to die a virgin."

There. The words were spoken, the bald statement echoing in his head. Neville gazed down into her wistful eyes and felt a surge of certainty. He wanted to be her champion. He wanted to be with her. He didn't want to die a virgin either.

Taking a deep breath to still the quaking of his insides at their daring, he said, "We won't."

Luna's eyes closed and she shivered as she nuzzled closer to him. Neville hugged her tight, resting his cheek on the crown of her head.

After a long moment, Luna backed away and murmured, "I suppose you'd better be heading back."

Nodding, Neville said, "I'll see you tomorrow."

Stepping back a few paces, Luna gazed at him, her expression a mixture of trepidation, anticipation, and hope. Without a word, Neville tapped his fingers over his heart, and Luna smiled as she did the same, then he Disapparated, leaving her alone in the chill night.

Neville took up residence in the same chair he had been brooding in before, staring blindly out into the night. Augusta paused in the doorway, troubled by his grim reflection in the window. Sidling into the room, she sat across from him and said, "What's bothering you this time? Every other night you've been in good spirits after seeing Luna..."

Neville flashed a small grimace and shrugged. He shrank into the chair and studied his fingernails as he mumbled, "I just... sometimes I wish Dad were around to talk to."

Augusta gasped at the pain Neville's wistful statement caused in her heart. "I always wish that, dear heart."

Neville glanced up at his grandmother's sorrowful expression and hastily added, "Not that you're not great, Gran..."

Augusta smiled fondly and waved her hand. "I know what you meant, Neville; I'm not offended." Neville's anxious expression melted away into the same pensive one she had walked in on. "I may not be a man, but I'll do whatever I can to help you; you know that."

Neville nodded, then swallowed and took a deep breath, straightening his shoulders even as he blushed furiously. If he was supposed to be Luna's champion, he had to be a man and stand up for them. "Well, it's like this... Luna's coming over tomorrow, and we're going to... uh, we won't want to be disturbed. We'll be in my room."

He struggled to meet his grandmother's eyes, exceedingly uncomfortable but determined to act like an adult. Augusta was staring at him blankly, totally unprepared for her only grandson to grow up so completely all at once. Regret that he had had to grow up so quickly while so young warred with pride that the boy she had worried about for so long had matured into such a fine young man.

Finally blinking, she swallowed hard and rasped, "I see. You're both of age, Neville. I certainly won't stop you."

Relief washed over him, and he goggled at her. "Wow...I mean, uh, thanks, Gran. It means a lot to both of us."

Augusta was doggedly rebuilding her composure. "However, dear, I will inquire as to whether or not you have considered how to take precautions...either of you?"

Neville's eyes widened, his cheeks flushing anew. Embarrassed, he mumbled, "I, uh, hadn't got that far yet. And, erm, she hasn't said anything either."

Lifting her chin with an arch sniff, Augusta said, "Perhaps you should visit the apothecary before she arrives."

Neville cleared his throat. "Yes, well, that's a wise idea. Thanks."

Augusta gave a wan smile and stood. Resting a hand on his shoulder, she said, "Make smart decisions, dear. Be careful. But..." She lifted her hand to smooth his hair like she had when he was a little boy and continued, her voice low but fierce, "...take what happiness you can when you have the chance, and enjoy all the love you find, because...as your father would tell you...you never know when it might all disappear."

She left him then, and he resolved to make the most of his time with Luna and defy the spectre of death that haunted them at every turn.

The next morning, Neville Apparated to the Apothecary and purchased some his-and-hers contraceptive potions in single-use vials. They were good for 24 hours at the dose given, and their shelf life was a year. He sent a message to Luna to come over as soon as she liked, even before lunch if she wanted to, then fidgeted in front of the fireplace while he waited for her to arrive.

About 20 minutes after he sent his message, Luna whirled out of the Floo and into Neville's welcoming embrace. She clung to him, kissing him deeply in her enthusiasm.

A few minutes later, Augusta Longbottom strode into the room, her garish red handbag on her arm, and said, "Oh, hello, Luna. So nice to see you, dear. I do apologize for being such a terrible hostess, but I have plans today, and I'll not be around. I'm sure Neville will take good care of you."

Luna smiled up at Neville and said, "Neville will always take good care of me, Mrs. Longbottom. We'll be fine. Enjoy your day."

Neville blushed, feeling awkward, but grateful that his grandmother was leaving them alone. As much as he knew they would have had privacy in his room, it was much more comfortable to know that no one else would be around at all. "Have a nice time, Gran. And... thanks."

His sheepish smile elicited an indulgent one from her as she said, "I don't know *what* you're talking about, I'm sure. At any rate, I'm off. Ta!"

She waved as she spun in the green flames, and Neville and Luna waved back. When she was gone, Neville took Luna's hand and said, "Come on; I got something for you...for us."

Bemused, Luna followed him into the kitchen, where he presented her with a tiny vial. "What's this?"

Neville held a similar vial...the potion was a different colour...and said, "They're, uh, contraceptives."

Luna's brows shot toward her hairline, and her eyes went wide. Neville held his breath, afraid he had misjudged, but then her lips spread into a wicked, delighted smile, and he exhaled in relief. Tilting her head, she un-stoppered the vial and lifted it, saying, "Cheers!"

Neville opened his vial and touched it to hers before they downed the doses in unison, knocking them back like a shot. Then...also in unison...they flailed about, spluttering and coughing at the acrid flavour. That was why Neville had led her to the kitchen: so they could drink something else and rinse out that taste. Rushing to pour some butterbeer for them both, Neville kept swallowing and grimacing.

They sucked in gulp after gulp of butterbeer, until it was all they could taste, then they exchanged glances of amusement and exasperation. Chuckling, Luna closed the distance between them, wrapped her arms around his neck, and said, "Now, where were we?"

She stretched up to kiss him, but Neville backed away, saying, "Let's go to my room."

Nodding, Luna let him lead her into his bedroom, where he shut the door and locked it, even though they were alone in the house. When he crossed to her at the side of his bed, they twined fingers and sat, both a little apprehensive about what was supposed to happen. After a pregnant pause, Luna murmured, "Thanks for getting those potions. I hadn't even thought about that."

Neville cut a nervous smile at her and said, "Well, I wouldn't want you to have to go through school pregnant and with a baby."

Luna nodded. They sat there, tense in another awkward silence. Then, Luna heaved a deep breath and turned to face Neville. "I'm glad I'm here. With you."

Neville smiled and leant forward to kiss her, pleased that she responded so eagerly. After a moment of snogging, he guided her to lean back onto the bed, and then they broke apart long enough to squirm up onto it long ways, instead of sprawled across it. While they were entwined, Neville felt Luna making abrupt movements, and he backed out of her fervent embrace to peer down their bodies.

She was trying to toe her boots off.

Neville chuckled and sat up, helping pull off her boots. Luna's expression went from frustrated to sheepish to grateful to wicked, all in quick succession. Neville, puzzled by the devious smirk gracing her lips, tossed her boots to the floor and kicked off his house-slippers as he said, "What?"

Luna licked her lips and said, her voice a sultry lilt, "Keep going."

Neville frowned at her, uncomprehending for a beat, then his brows shot toward his hairline and his eyes flew open wide as he gasped in understanding. His gut seized up and he swallowed hard. His face went hot, and he locked eyes with her as he settled beside her again, propped up on one elbow. With his free hand, he reached over and began undoing the buttons of her shirt.

Luna's pupils dilated as she watched Neville starting to undress her. Her breathing sped up, and she returned the favour by reaching over to untuck his shirt from his trousers. When Neville had unbuttoned her shirt, he slid his hand between the panels and caressed her ribs, smoothing up to her bra and making her arch toward him.

Luna grabbed his hair and pulled him down to kiss him deeply, gasping and sighing into his mouth as his fingers tickled over the crest of her bra, seeking the warm flesh within. After several long minutes, Luna pushed at Neville, and he reared back instantly, eyes wide with fear that he had done something wrong. Luna struggled to sit up and pulled him up alongside her. "Take your shirt off."

Neville exhaled in relief and yanked the shirt over his head, letting it drop to the floor beside the bed. Luna let her gaze roam over his bare chest, and her lips spread into a wicked smile. Biting her lower lip, she tugged free of her opened shirt and flung it away. Neville couldn't tear his eyes away from her naked skin, and when she reached back and unclasped her bra, letting the straps slide down her arms, he exhaled a low note of appreciation.

Luna held the loose bra to her chest and lay back again, her expression inviting Neville to rejoin her. He sank back down beside her, and she moved her hands away, letting the fabric cover her breasts. She gripped his hand and whispered, "You do it."

Neville groaned and slid his hand over her belly and under the bra, nudging it to one side as his fingers gently caressed her breasts, cupping them in turn, letting his palm rest against her stiffening nipples. Luna gasped, then sighed and arched into his touch, her eyes drifting closed. Emboldened by her response, Neville shifted onto his knees over her, resting his body against hers as he leant down to kiss her. Luna trailed her hands up and down his back and across his chest, nearly humming in pleasure. She lifted one leg to hook her foot behind his knee, urging him to press harder where he was settled between her legs.

The press of her foot made him thrust forward, grinding his erection against her cleft and eliciting a grunt. Neville dropped nibbling kisses along her jaw line back to her ear, suckling on her lobe...which was thankfully devoid of vegetation jewellery. Luna grazed one hand down his back and grabbed at his arse, squeezing, and rocked her hips to grind against him in return.

Her breathless, "Neville..." made him back away, panting. Unbidden, his gaze kept dropping to her breasts, flushed and peaked, before he lifted his eyes to meet hers again. Holding his gaze, she said, "I know you're always in here..." she waved her hand over her heart, "...but now I want you in *here*..." and she tilted her hips, rocking against his hard cock as she squeezed his arse again.

Eyes nearly rolling back and erection spasming violently, Neville sighed and eased backward, leaning down to trail kisses over her breasts as he carefully unfastened his belt and trousers. Luna, taken aback by him suckling her nipples, back and forth, cried out in delight and tangled her fingers in his hair instead of following her original plan of undoing her trousers as well. But Neville had everything under control, and he had her shimmying out of her trousers in no time, nipping at her breasts all the while.

He backed away enough to get her feet out of the garment that he ended up edging off the end of the bed, shoving at his opened trousers to wrench free. As he stepped out of his trousers, he pushed his socks to his ankles and toed them off, eventually standing there in just his y-fronts, staring apprehensively at Luna lying on his bed in just her knickers and socks.

Her underwear was just as whimsical as her other clothing...a light blue bikini with little rainbows ending in cartoon clouds. Her socks were white with blue and grey snowflakes. The juxtaposition of such cute and silly clothing with an almost nude woman on his bed made Neville smile...it was just so... so... *Luna*.

The realization helped him relax and not feel self-conscious about the way his cock was straining at his pants, and how there was already a translucent wet spot on the fabric near the tip. Crawling back onto the bed, he lifted her feet one at a time, peeling her socks off and dropping them with the rest of their clothes. Not quite ready to divest her of her knickers, he lay over her again, dipping down to snog her and enjoy the sensation of skin on skin.

After another long bout of heated snogging and grinding and groping, Luna gasped, "Neville, don't you want to be with me?"

Brow furrowed, he backed away and said, "Of course! I just don't want to rush you."

She pinned him with a gaze of crackling desire and said, "You're not rushing at all! I want you so much..."

Again, she tightened her legs wrapped around his and gripped his arse...this time with her hand inside his pants. The heat of her cleft through their pants was maddening, but Neville mumbled, "I want you, too, but... I don't want to hurt you! I've heard the other blokes talk about hurting the girl her first time."

Luna laughed, the merry, trilling sound startling Neville from his worry. "Neville, darling, any witch who's been riding brooms since childhood like I have shouldn't have anything to worry about!"

Frowning in anxiety, he said, "Are you sure?"

Luna undulated against him and purred, "Let me prove it."

Neville stared at her for a beat, then nodded faintly. Luna crowed in triumph and began squirming out of her knickers, nodding at Neville to do the same. As soon as he shoved his pants past his arse, his erection bobbed forward, bouncing against her thigh. Luna hummed in appreciation and reached over to gently wrap her fingers around the length. Neville gasped, kicking his pants to the floor.

Luna gingerly stroked Neville's cock, caressing down over his bollocks and back up to the tip, circling the ridge around the head. Neville held himself rigid above her, his eyes screwed shut and grimacing in concentration to *not* shoot in her hand. The delicious sensations of her tender touch made him voice a soft moan. Finally, she let go, and Neville was able to open his eyes again, sucking in a deep breath as he glanced down between them. Luna had stopped touching him in favour of touching herself, and he nearly choked at the sight of her fingers slipping into her dark blond curls and sliding back out, gleaming wetly in the light.

He took them both by surprise when he said, "I'll do that."

Luna blinked at him, then smiled and tilted, "By all means..."

Neville backed up, settling onto his knees between her legs, his erection jutting out as he turned his attention to her damp curls. He lightly traced one finger along her cleft, watching her body ripple at the tickling sensation. Then, when he pressed harder, slipping between her slick folds, she squeaked and writhed, rocking onto his hand and directing his touch to her swollen clit. Her sharp cry made him pause, and she ground onto him, moaning. Neville's cock bounced in excitement, and he daringly circled her clit, grinning at his apparent success when she gasped and grabbed his wrist, holding him in place. Unbidden, a faint, "Wow..." crossed his lips.

Luna held his wrist in an iron grip, and Neville kept circling her clit. Her breathing became erratic, and she alternated between gasps and keens of pleasure. After several moments, she forced her eyes open and turned her fevered gaze to his. "Neville, I want you."

Both of them noticed the decided throb his cock gave in answer. Nodding, Neville crawled back over her, ending his assault on her clit in favour of sliding his finger down lower, spreading the moisture that had gathered in her excitement. His fingertip dipped into her cunt and she whimpered, a needy, encouraging sound. Closing the distance between them, he grasped his erection and guided it toward her heat, pressing down between her damp curls and delving into her slowly.

Luna wrapped her legs around his hips, her heels on his arse firmly pushing him closer. When the head of his cock sank in, she sucked in a sharp breath, overwhelmed by the stretching, full sensation and the triumphant joy that she was sharing such intimacy with Neville, her champion.

Neville, worried that he would hurt her, watched her anxiously. After her initial gasp, which made him stop, she pulled him down to kiss him, urging him to continue. As they snogged, he sank deeper, centimetre-by-centimetre, until he was finally fully sheathed within her. Luna hummed in satisfaction and squeezed her legs around him tighter, making Neville rock his hips, grinding against her.

Her delighted squeal made him back away to meet her gaze, and his breath caught at her dazzling smile. Shaking his head and chuckling faintly at the way she was beaming at him, he murmured, "You're amazing."

Luna's sultry giggle made him grin back as she rocked her hips and said, "Mmm, so are you."

Neville shifted so he pulled out about halfway, then thrust back in, making her shriek in shocked pleasure. She was so responsive, so candid in her enjoyment... Neville's chest tightened with the newly discovered feeling of love, and he felt powerful, like he could do anything, face anybody...really be a champion.

Ducking down to kiss her fiercely, he withdrew and sank back in, experimenting with different depths and speeds and ways of thrusting or grinding. Luna gasped and keened and shrieked and kissed him, her body clutching at him and wanting more. Neville's grunts and gasps became more erratic and frequent, signalling his climb toward his peak, and a surge of power raced through Luna's veins at the knowledge that her body was driving him to such pleasure. The jolt ended in her clit, and she snaked one hand down between them to touch herself while he kept thrusting, wanting to orgasm around him.

Neville felt her hand moving and started to back away, but Luna grabbed at him with her other hand and breathed, "Don't stop."

Looking down, he saw her fingers dipping between her swollen lips, rubbing her clit as his cock plunged deep, and he groaned at the electric sizzle that swept over him. His groan was followed by Luna's moan, her head canting back as her fingers danced faster between them. Neville knew he wouldn't last much longer with the sensory overload of bliss, but he held on as best he could, wanting desperately to see this woman shatter in ecstasy before him.

Luna's other hand crept down his back to dig her nails into his arse, her legs tightening as well, to pull him deeper, to bring them closer. Her breath hitched, and she opened her eyes to gaze up at Neville, her face contorting into an expression of beatific joy as she hissed a drawn-out, "Yesssss..." her body shuddering and bucking beneath his with the force of her orgasm.

Neville choked on his hastily indrawn breath, eyes wide, drinking in the sight of Luna undulating in ecstasy. Her cunt clamped down on his cock where it was buried inside her, and he voiced a shocked grunt as the rhythmic squeezing hurtled him over the edge, his climax almost ambushing him. Luna's hiss turned into a sated moan, climbing in pitch and intensity when she felt Neville's body going rigid as he came, encouraging him to reach his peak with her.

The trembling convulsions that followed the initial moment of stillness heralding Neville's orgasm left him panting and thrusting faintly to draw out the exquisite sensations of filling her so completely. Luna rocked her hips, deliberately tightening her inner muscles to tease him. With every clench, Neville would gasp and twitch, exhaling a low moan of satisfaction.

Finally, Neville allowed his muscles to go slack, lowering himself to press against Luna, who had withdrawn her hand from between them in favour of wrapping her arms around his neck, pulling him closer to kiss him again. Their racing pulses slowed, and they remained entwined, Neville's slowly deflating erection still lodged within her and making him grind in response to her every playful squeeze.

After a long, languorous bout of snogging, Neville's cock slipped out, and he took the opportunity to back away and lie on his side, guiding Luna to turn with him, his hand stroking along her back and over her arse. Luna heaved a contented sigh followed by a yawn, and Neville smiled. Moving to draw a blanket over them, he snuggled her close, wrapping his arm around her shoulder as she flung one arm across his ribs and hooked one leg over his, resting her head on his bicep, her cheek against his chest.

They had settled that way, relaxing enough to drop into a light doze, but Neville was jerked back to awareness by Luna's whisper. "Thank you."

Brow furrowed, Neville hugged her tighter and pressed a kiss to her tangled hair. "Luna, you don't have to thank me. That's just... weird."

Luna shrugged. "Well, you didn't have to do any of this, but you did, and it was wonderful, and I'm grateful. I just wanted you to know."

Neville rolled so Luna was on her back and he was half-propped above her on his side, making sure they could see into each other's eyes. Expression serious, he said, "Luna, I did all this for *us*. I mean, I hope there's an *us*..."

Luna's eyes were glassy but she beamed up at him. "I had hoped the same thing."

Neville's face cleared of anxiety and he smiled in relief. "The last couple of weeks have been completely unexpected, but being with you..." He trailed off, searching for words, frowning as he looked away. Then, he flushed as he met her gaze again, swallowing hard as he took the plunge. "You've been my friend for years, but now... I love you."

Luna pulled him down to kiss him fiercely, then, her hand cupping his cheek, she backed away and said, "I love you, Neville...Pillow Fight Champion, Snowball Fight Champion, Champion of my Heart." She tapped her chest and added, "Always. In here."

Neville caught her fingers and lifted them to his lips, dropping a feather-light kiss on each one, the joy in his heart threatening to burst his chest. Luna grazed her fingertips over his cheek and up into his hair, pulling him down to pledge her love non-verbally.

After a while, they snuggled back under the blanket and dozed off. When they awoke, their desire awoke as well, and they took their time trying new things to please each other. When the early dusk fell, they realized that they hadn't stopped to eat lunch, and they were famished. They giggled as they dressed, then hurried down to the kitchen to make some sandwiches and tea, barely releasing each other's hands long enough to prepare their food.

As soon as they were done, they raced back up to his room, tickling and playing and laughing the whole time. Their antics had them tussling, falling on the bed again, where their silliness quickly turned into eagerly tearing each other's clothes off, wanting to get as much as they could of being together before they had to leave for Hogwarts again the next day. Neville gratefully reflected that he was glad he was a teenager, so multiple romps were completely possible.

That evening, as they basked in the afterglow of yet another bout of shagging, they heard Augusta returning downstairs. Exchanging sober glances at the reminder that Luna had to go home soon, they silently dressed and brushed their hair, smoothing the wild tangles resulting from their liaisons. Hand in hand, they descended to find Mrs. Longbottom cooking in the kitchen.

"Oh, hello, dears! Are you hungry? Everything should be ready in a few minutes."

Luna leant into Neville's encircling arm and said, "I appreciate the offer, Mrs. Longbottom, but I should get home. I know Dad would want me to have dinner with him since we leave for school tomorrow."

Augusta nodded. "Of course. I understand completely. Well, it's been lovely having you to visit, Luna, dear. I hope you can come see us again next holiday."

Luna smiled and cut a significant glance at Neville. "I hope so too." Tilting her head toward the door, she added, "I better go."

Neville nodded and said, "I'll be right back to help you with dinner, Gran."

Augusta waved her hand airily. "No worries, dear. Good night, Luna."

"Good night, Mrs. Longbottom."

Neville and Luna walked slowly to the fireplace in the living room, wanting to draw out their time together as long as possible. Arms wrapped around each other, they stood silently for a long moment, then Luna said, "Today was amazing."

Neville grunted an affirmative and murmured, "Indeed. Maybe we'll just have to work out a way to be alone back at school. Because...I'll be honest...I don't want to be apart from you, especially now that I know what I'd be missing."

Luna chuckled and said, "I know what you mean. But, I still can't shake the feeling that something bad will happen. That's why I'm so glad I got the chance to know how wonderful it is to love you."

Neville lifted her face to his and said, "Whether we get to be together again while at Hogwarts or not, I'll still love you. And we'll always be together in here." He tapped his fingers first on his chest and then on hers before ducking in to kiss her. Breaking the kiss and pressing his forehead to hers, he added, "And I'll do everything I can to be your Champion."

Luna's smile was tremulous as she cupped his cheek and whispered, "If you get the chance..."

Neville frowned at her cryptic rejoinder, but she kissed him hard and backed away.

"I have to go. My dad will be worrying."

Neville nodded. "See you tomorrow at King's Cross."

Luna crossed to the hearth and tossed a pinch of Floo powder into the flames, turning them green in an instant. Tilting her head as she looked back at Neville, she said, "I hope so," before stepping into the grate and whirling out of sight.

Neville stared at the flames for a long moment, hoping the heat would fight off the foreboding chill her manner had sent down his spine. Shuddering, he spun and rejoined his grandmother in the kitchen for dinner.

When they were seated at the table serving up food, Augusta said, "I trust you had a pleasant day?"

Neville blushed and coughed, but said, "We did. Thanks." Then, he took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. "I love her, Gran. And she loves me." His lips spread in to a delighted grin and he added, "It's pretty amazing, actually."

Augusta smiled and said, "As well it should be, dear." Neville chuckled. "I'm glad you're happy, especially since it gives you something to look forward to after the war is over."

Neville nodded and murmured, "And something to fight for."

Augusta paused, looking at her grandson with fresh eyes, and saw the man within the boyish exterior. Pride welled up along with the knowledge that Neville would be a worthy champion for the Light, and she patted his hand across the table. "Your parents would be proud of you, Neville. Just like I am."

Neville smiled humbly. "Thanks, Gran."

The next morning, Neville was eager to get to King's Cross and see Luna. Even though they couldn't have *that* kind of privacy on the train, he was looking forward to spending that time with her uninterrupted. He kissed his grandmother goodbye and Apparated to Platform 9 ¾, nodding greetings at his schoolmates in the milling crowd. Minutes ticked by, and Neville took up residence on a raised platform, anxiously scanning the throng for a familiar blonde head. Instead, he saw Ginny waving at him as she closed the distance toward him.

"Hey, Neville! Good to see you. How was your holiday?"

Neville smiled and said, "It was pretty great, actually. Have you seen Luna anywhere?"

Ginny shook her head and turned to peer at the teeming mass of robed figures. "No. But you've got a better vantage point from up there. I can't see anything."

Neville grimaced and squinted, shading his eyes from the sun, trying to spot Luna. "I'm gonna' stay out here until I see her. Go ahead and get a compartment if you like."

Ginny nodded and pushed toward the train. "Don't be too long; the train leaves in a few minutes."

Neville waved acknowledgement and Ginny disappeared. The crowd began thinning as students boarded the train and families left the station. Soon, there were only small clumps of people still on the platform, and the warning whistle had sounded. Ginny appeared at the doorway nearest him and shouted, "Neville, come *on!* The train's about to leave!"

Neville jumped down and sprinted toward Ginny, stepping onto the lowest step. Ginny heaved a relieved sigh, but as she backed away to let him enter, he grabbed her arm and hissed, "Something's wrong! Luna said she had a feeling something would happen. I can't just go like this without trying to help!"

Ginny stared at him in worry. "What are you talking about? Maybe she's sick and will get to Hogwarts a different way later. Or maybe her father has decided to keep her home, like so many others have."

The train started to inch forward, and Neville said, his expression unyielding, "She was perfectly healthy when we spent the whole day in my bed yesterday." Ginny's brows shot up and she gasped in comprehension. Neville nodded grimly. "And her father knows she's safer with other wizards about...especially me. He knows I would never let anything happen to her."

Ginny's eyes were bright with unshed tears as she inclined her head. "She's a lucky witch. Just... be careful."

Neville squeezed Ginny's arm and flashed a smile. "I will. I promise. I'll see you at school later."

The train was gaining speed, and Neville contemplated jumping from the step to the ground, but thought better of it, instead releasing Ginny's arm and concentrating. He Disapparated from the step, and Ginny gasped again. Swallowing hard, she wiped her eyes and backed into the corridor, hoping with all her might that Luna and Neville would both turn up at Hogwarts safe and unscathed.

Neville Apparated into the front yard at Luna's house. Wand out, he paused in the snow, ears straining to hear anything. The woods were eerily silent, and he could hear his own heartbeat thundering as he carefully tiptoed up to the front door. He felt as if his heart had stopped when he got to the top step...the front door was ajar, and the frame was splintered where it had been blasted open in spite of the lock.

Casting a Shield Spell on himself, he stealthily pushed the door open more, a Stunning Spell on the tip of his tongue, ready at a moment's notice. The house was as quiet as the woods, and he fought to steady his ragged breathing. Some of the furniture was toppled and awry, and it was obvious to him that there had been a struggle...scorch marks from mis-aimed spells marred the walls. Sending up a silent prayer to any gods who may have been paying attention that Luna was safe, he crept further in, past the couch flung onto its back, only to see Xeno Lovegood's still form crumpled on the floor.

Flicking a glance around for any sign that there were any other foes still lurking, he rushed to the older man, dropping to his knees beside him and laying a trembling hand on his shoulder, turning him onto his back. Xeno's hair spread over his face, and Neville brushed it back, noting that the man's eyes were closed. There was no blood, but a bruise was blooming along one cheek. Leaning down, he felt faint breath against his cheek and pressed a hand to Xeno's neck, reassured by his pulse. Glancing around again, still on edge, Neville pointed his wand at the unconscious man and said, "*Ennervate*."

Xeno roused fitfully, scowling as he awoke to pain and confusion. When he opened his dazed eyes and saw Neville looming over him, he shouted in fear and scrambled away, searching for his wand. Neville cried, "Mr. Lovegood, it's okay! It's me, Neville. I'm here to help. You're safe. What happened?"

Xeno fell back to the floor and looked wildly about, eyes wide in terror. His voice was a wail of anguish as he said, "*Luna*?"

Neville leant forward and reached toward the distraught man, grabbing his attention. "What happened? Where is Luna?"

The despair and pain in his voice cut Neville like a knife as Xeno said, "They took her! They took my girl! We were about to leave for the station and they...they just burst in here and...and we didn't have time to defend ourselves! They knocked her out immediately, and when I tried to fight back, they struck me. Then the big one flung her over his shoulder and took her away, and the skinny one told me it's what I deserved for supporting Harry Potter in the *Quibbler*. Then...then they Stunned me. I don't know where they took her or what they've done to her! My darling girl!"

He broke down in wracking sobs, and Neville pulled the shaking man into an awkward embrace. Throat tight and eyes burning, Neville growled, "It'll be all right. I promise. We'll find out what happened and we'll get her back." Swallowing back the lump in his throat, Neville released Mr. Lovegood and stood. "I'm going to get help. Just stay here."

The older man rocked himself as he wept, repeating Luna's name in a whimper. Neville took a deep breath and Apparated to his house, surprising his grandmother in the kitchen.

"Merciful heavens, Neville! You nearly scared the life out of me! What are you doing here? Why aren't you on the train?"

Neville strode purposefully toward her, gripping her arms and pinning her with a stern gaze. "Gran, they took Luna. She didn't show up at the station and I went to her house. The living room was in shambles and Mr. Lovegood was out cold on the floor. He was beaten and Stunned, and he said they Stunned Luna and took her as punishment for supporting Harry in the *Quibbler*." Augusta gasped, eyes wide in pity and horror. "Mr. Lovegood is a wreck, and I need to let the Order know. She can't be gone, Gran... She just can't."

His voice broke at the end of his words, and his face crumpled, trying to keep a tight grip on the emotions that wanted to break free. Augusta twitched out of his grasp and wrapped her arms around her grandson, hugging him tight and crooning soothing nonsense as he choked back shuddering sobs. "I'll go straight to the Lovegoods' and take Mr. Lovegood to the Ministry, and you go to Hogsmeade. Talk to Professor McGonagall as soon as you can. But be careful, dear. You can't help Luna if you get yourself caught or... worse."

Neville nodded, sniffing and gulping, fighting for control. "Thanks, Gran. Take care of Mr. Lovegood, please. She's all he has left."

Augusta patted his back and crossed to pick up her bag. "Of course, dear. He's in good hands."

Neville watched her pause in the doorway and said, "I know. The best."

They exchanged watery smiles and she left, leaving Neville in the kitchen. Wiping his face and blowing his nose, he composed himself, then Disapparated.

McGonagall had left him to his own devices after he had been allowed into the grounds to tell her what had happened. Unwilling to stay in the castle waiting for the rest of the students to arrive, he walked back to the Hogsmeade station. Huddling with his back to the station wall, he remained lost in thought, desperately trying to figure out how to find Luna and save her.

After a while, he went into the station and asked for some parchment and a quill and ink, nodding in thanks when the clerk gave him a scrap. He retreated into the toilets to closet himself away from prying eyes and wrote a letter to Luna.

"Dear Luna,

I know you've been taken, but I don't know where or what they've done to you. I found your father and Gran's gone to look after him. The Order knows what's happened, and we're all going to do everything we can to find you and get you back safe. I'm sorry I wasn't there to protect you. But I won't let you down. And that's a promise. If I'm to be your Champion, I have to act like one. I love you. You've given me something to look forward to, something to fight for. We will win this war. I don't know how long it will take, but the Light will prevail. And never forget: we may not be together in person right now, but we're always together in our hearts. Don't give up. Never lose hope. Stay as strong and beautiful and faithful as you've always been, and we'll be together again, just like we were yesterday. I don't know whether you'll even get this, but I needed to send it either way. I miss you already. Be smart and careful wherever you are, and I'll keep fighting the good fight.

Yours,

Neville"

Wiping at the tears that leaked past his lashes as he wrote, he fished the fake Galleon from his pocket and cast the spells to copy his letter onto the coin and send it to Luna's. The text coiled around the edge, filling the gold with a spiral groove, and warmed as it transferred to her Galleon. Swallowing hard, Neville clasped the coin in his hand and pressed it to his chest, above his heart, in a salute of resolve and promise. When the coin had cooled again, he Vanished the parchment and pocketed the Galleon, exiting the toilets to return the quill and ink.

Taking up residence on the platform again, a figure of grim determination, he waited.

In the darkness of the Malfoys' dungeon, still weak and dazed from the Stunning spell and rough manhandling, Luna lay wandless and disoriented. Struggling to keep her fear for her father and herself from overwhelming her, she felt the comforting burn of her fake Galleon in her pocket and smiled.

She wouldn't be able to read what it said, but it didn't matter. She knew it was from Neville, and she gathered strength from their connection. She would be all right. Her dream the night before had shown her that. She had seen Neville defying the Dark Lord and wielding the sword of Gryffindor, and she knew everything would come out right in the end.

She would be safe.

He was her Champion.