

The Power of Self-Reliance

by Rose of the West

Neville longs to be seen differently.

Self-Reliance

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: The characters here and the world they inhabit are the creation and property of JK Rowling and her assigns.

This can be considered a companion piece to "The Power of Positive Thinking," but should stand alone without it.

"What's the matter, Neville?"

He looked up to see the new Potions mistress next to him. He had drifted into the library that afternoon without much hope. He was looking for something, anything, that would help him achieve a certain goal, but the Hogwarts library wasn't designed to answer such questions. "It's nothing, Luna."

"I can tell it's something."

He heaved a sigh. "I'm just tired of being seen as useless or a lesser wizard."

"Of course you aren't a lesser wizard. Who killed the snake?"

"That's the beginning and end of what people know me for."

"You also led us all through that last year."

He shrugged. "It was more than ten years ago, and not everyone got to see that."

Luna stood on tiptoe and stretched her neck to follow his line of vision through some stacks. The Deputy Headmistress was sorting through some Transfiguration references. Luna looked at the expression on Neville's face and nodded. "I see."

He blushed. "It doesn't matter. I'll always be a bit chubby and too stupid."

Luna looked him up and down, causing him to blush even harder. "It's just a matter of perception. Perhaps something that helped me can help you."

She nodded toward the door and started walking. Neville decided to follow her. As they reached the door, it swung wide open. Neville took a step back as he found himself face-to-face with the Headmaster. Although this was his second year teaching at Hogwarts, he still didn't like to meet his employer unexpectedly.

Snape wasn't looking at him, though. He was looking at Luna with a softer glare than he usually employed. Oddly enough, Luna's usually serene exterior was more of a glowing agitation. A thought flitted through Neville's mind, but he tamped it down.

"Those requisitions won't submit themselves, Professor Lovegood, and classes start in three weeks."

Luna's thin shoulder shrugged. "I've just about finished the inventory, and I'll have that and the requisitions to you by the end of the day. Keep your pants on, Severus." Neville wasn't sure, but he thought he heard, "I'll help you with them later," said under her breath.

As they walked down to the dungeons, where Luna had taken over the office that was Snape's when they were students, Neville asked, "So what helped you out?"

"Oh," she said airily. "I looked into Muggle self-help."

"Does it really work?"

Luna nodded. "You wouldn't believe it. Some of my books were inadvertently destroyed, but I have a few left."

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About a week before the students were expected to arrive, the Deputy Headmistress stood in the hallway near the front door of the school and watched various packages as they came in. Occasionally something was mislabeled and she needed to direct it.

She was fascinated by an odd contraption that was floating in through the door, tilting to one side to fit and then righting itself. It was followed by a box of books and then, of all people, Neville Longbottom. He was watching his objects carefully, but didn't appear to be under any strain or great effort.

"Neville! What are you doing?"

"Hm? Oh, hello, Hermione. I'm putting a few last items in my rooms. He flicked his wand and they went up the stairs, still ahead of him.

"Neville! How are you—I mean, I didn't have any idea you could—er..." Hermione didn't know what to say. Anything she said would be incredibly insulting.

"Would you like to help me sort through my new books? I know you'll have great ideas about how to organize them."

"I—well, of course I would." She couldn't resist an invitation like that, and she was strangely curious about this Neville, who could casually tilt that strange apparatus on its side as he guided it through the door and sent the box after it, all while speaking over his shoulder to her.

"So what is that... contraption?" she asked.

"It's a Muggle weight machine. I thought you would recognize it."

Once it was on the floor, she did recognize it. "Oh, yes. Do you use it?" She thought to herself that it was a foolish question. Of course he did. She really looked at him for the first time in years. He was amazingly... fit. Something odd flitted through her tummy, something it hadn't done since it became clear that Ron wouldn't recover from his illness several years before.

"Actually, I have no idea how it works. It makes a wonderful object to practice levitation, though."

Hermione looked at it again and noticed that some of the belts and chains were sagging and loose. "I see that." How then, had he become so... strong-looking? She chanced another look and thought about it. For the past year, as she had carried out her duties of inspecting his classes, she had watched him lugging heavy plants and toting measures of soil and fertilizer. He had gotten his stature the old-fashioned way, she realized with another flutter.

He had opened his box and was placing stacks of books on the table by the time she had recalled what she was doing. She leaned over and tilted her head to read the spines of the books. "*Transfiguring Plants? Horticultural Growth and the Changing Art?* What are you doing with these books, Neville?"

"It's a new branch I wanted to explore," he said. "Luna always told me that when I wanted to improve any of my skills I should start from Herbology and look at books about plants and the other skill. It's done wonders for my Potions work."

Luna, again. How was it that the blond-haired flake was able to attract all the wizards? Not that she cared of course, Hermione told herself. She turned away from him. "Is Luna helping you with your work?"

"No, actually, I was hoping *you* would help me."

Whatever that was in her tummy started a new flutter that went right up her chest as an electric tingle. She turned back toward him. "If you like."

"Of course I—ahem—that would be agreeable." He looked at her and she felt an actual shiver as she realized that he was looking at her intently. He cleared his throat and shook his head. "It's no good, Hermione. I've been trying this whole past year to catch your attention. Luna suggested I try these Muggle books, and they tell me to be aloof, but it's just not me."

"You've been trying—"

"I know that it may not be long enough since Ron died, but I've really come to admire you in ways I tried to ignore."

"You... and... me?"

He shook his head. "I'm sorry, Hermione. I know I'm not smart enough. I'll try to forget all about it."

It finally fell into place in her mind. "Actually, Neville, I think..."

He looked at her, hope all over his face. She thought hard, as quickly as she could. Neville was a gentle soul who might be easily hurt if she wasn't careful. The last thing she wanted to do was raise unrealistic expectations.

"Why don't we work on your Herbology and Transfiguration texts together and see what happens?"

"I'd like that," he said. He took a step closer to her and hugged her. That fluttery-tingly thing went through her in a white-hot flash. She tilted her head up and looked into his face. Then she raised herself on tiptoe and brushed her lips to his. He smiled at her even as she pulled away.

"I—I need to look at my schedule, make some lists..." she said in a rush. "Why don't we meet at dinner and work out a study schedule?"

He nodded. Once a study schedule was made, he knew she would spend every allotted minute with him until they knew everything they needed to know. He hoped it would be a very long time before they knew *everything*.

A/N: Thank you to Blue Artemis for beta reading this for me!

Based upon a Saturday Night Drabble prompt from the lovely and talented Muse Amusant: Neville is tired of being perceived as wimpy and ineffectual and decides to take a Muggle approach to self-improvement.