

The Last Longbottom

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How far would you go for love? Episode two of 'The D.A. Chronicles'.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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On a nondescript sidewalk, off a nondescript street, in a nondescript neighbourhood, Neville Longbottom stared into the abyss. He stood out among the Muggles that bustled about, wrapped up in their singular lives with their mundane concerns. Big Ben tolled in the distance, and Neville opened his palm. The Sneakoscope within lay dormant, so he ventured into the back alley away from prying eyes. At the end of the alley, a tall, thin man wearing a dark overcoat paced nervously. When he saw Neville approach, he discarded his fag, stamped it out and expelled the smoke from his lungs.

The man glared at Neville. "You're late. Who do you think you are, making me wait?"

"I'm the bloke who has your gold, Tavin, so we are here at *my* pleasure." Neville's tone was equally severe.

"No need to get testy, Guv'nor." Tavin reached into his pocket and took out a glass vial. "Getting caught with this stuff earns you a one-way ticket to Azkaban, ya know."

"That's no longer your problem, is it?"

When Neville proffered his hand, Tavin warily obliged him. "Did you bring my gold?"

Neville sneered and removed the cap. "You don't mind if I test it first, do you?" He took a swab of the red powder therein and placed it inside another smaller vial, containing a clear liquid, that was hidden inside his cloak. The liquid turned purple.

Tavin looked on, impatient. "That product is cut one hundred percent pure. I'd stake my reputation on it."

"Such as it is." Neville held the vial up to the sunlight.

"Oh, you're a clever one, aren't you?" The liquid inside the vial sparkled. "Satisfied?"

Neville smiled and tossed Tavin a leather bag. Tavin loosened the drawstring and beheld the gold sovereigns inside. With a greedy grin, he nodded to Neville, closing the deal, and left.

Time was the enemy. Neville risked Apparating during the day and soon found himself at the doorstep of his family household in central London. With a wave of his hand, the door opened for him as he crossed the threshold.

His movements awoke the effigy of his late grandmother Augusta. She opened her eyes and watched him enter from the foyer. "Neville, where have you been?"

"Out, Gran." He threw his cloak over the house-elf standing by the chimney.

"Don't be short with me, young man. When are you going to bring Hannah and my new great-grandchild by to come see me?"

"Soon, Gran."

The house-elf shook the cloak clean and levitated it onto the coat rack. "Welcome home, Master Neville. I took the liberty of securing today's post in your study."

"Thank you, Wyston." Without breaking stride, Neville drew his wand and Accio'd the mail. "Anything of importance?"

Wyston followed behind his master. "I suspect that most of the messages are letters of condolence, sir."

"That they are, Wyston. Anything else?"

"Master Harry and Minister Shackbolt came by personally to pay their respects. I took the liberty of telling them you would be *unavailable* for the foreseeable future."

"Good man...er, elf." Without regard, he tossed the letters over his shoulder. "If you would be so kind as to reply to these with my gratitude or whatever etiquette is appropriate for such correspondence."

"Very good, sir." So commanded, the letters magically flocked to Wyston's waiting hands into a tidy stack. "Will there be anything else before I prepare this evening's repast?"

"Yes." Neville entered his study and fetched an envelope bearing the Longbottom family crest. "Send this letter of resignation to the minister along with the rest of the outgoing post, will you?"

"I understand." Wyston halted at the entrance.

"I'll take my dinner in the study tonight. I am not to be disturbed." Neville closed the door; his wand remained at the ready:

Muffliato!

The clock on the mantle ticked the seconds away quietly. Neville unrolled a scroll of blank parchment atop his desk. The quill, parked in its inkwell, lay inanimate until he spoke, "Password: Leaky Cauldron," and the quill stood on end, awaiting his words.

"July 18, 2007. This is an addendum to project 'Regeneration Matrix' concerning subject Hannah Longbottom...."

He paused, allowing the quill to catch up while he reflected on the enormity of that statement. He prepared the ingredients and added them to the cauldron one by one.

"Neural stem and precursor cells reside in the ventricular lining of the fetal forebrain and may provide a cellular substrate for brain repair. In both the Gamma and Epsilon trials, I have observed incremental improvement in subjects *Frank* and *Alice*. Unfortunately, the time critical nature of subject Hannah's...*event* has prompted me to seek the use of Hellsbane in order to mitigate certain inconsistencies that make the regeneration protocol contraindicative for testing on living patients. If my hypothesis is correct, the timely introduction of related donor cells, coupled with conventional healing charms, may reverse cellular apoptosis."

The quill scribbled frantically.

Neville continued to orate as he painstakingly measured and doled out the ingredients of his special brew. He was mentally exhausted by the time the potion was ready. He held the Hellsbane over the bubbling cauldron. "As a final note, Apparition can be destructive to the polymers, so once the catalyst is complete, I'll have thirty-six minutes to deliver it before it becomes unviable."

Neville sprinkled the red powder into the mixture and collected the sparkles into a black non-reflective jar. He checked his pocket watch as he left the room, the door swung open at his command. He was surprised to find Wyston waiting in the foyer, holding a broom twice his height.

"I took the liberty of having your broom calibrated, Master Neville."

"Wyston, I thought I dismissed you for the evening."

"You did, sir. I just wanted to wish you luck."

Neville's eyes narrowed. "And how do you know what I'm up to?"

"It is a poor elf who does not come to know his master."

Neville took the proffered broom, mounted it and flew away. After fifteen long minutes, he arrived at his destination, setting down unseen behind St Mungos under the cover of a Confundus Charm. He discarded the broom and scanned the area before knocking on the door. After a few seconds the door opened; the young eyes of a nurse peeked outside.

"Detective Auror Longbottom," she greeted. "You'll find the way is clear to the staircase."

Neville entered. "I am in your debt."

"Nonsense." She closed the door behind him. "I trust you're prepared to contend with the Anti-Confundus Charms on the upper floors?"

Neville merely smiled in return, donned his invisibility cloak and left her. He found the stairs and made his way to the lowest level. He opened the door and entered the dimly lit room. He threw off his cloak...the air was nippy. He found a manifest and scrolled his finger down the page, stopping on the entry labelled 'Longbottom.'

He opened the associated locker, pulled out the slab and uncovered the small bump underneath the thin sheet. He inserted a needle into the subject's tiny forehead and worked quickly to extract the contents. When he was finished, he draped its little arm back across its chest and replaced the sheet. He pushed the slab in, more slowly this time, as if to prevent the squeak of the rails from waking its deathly still cargo.

Neville checked his pocket watch. *Twenty-six minutes*. And he took the stairs up to the fifth floor. He unfolded the enchanted map and regarded the layout of the floor inscribed thereon. Footsteps magically tracked across the page; he waited until the way clear. Using the map as a guide, he was able to avoid unwanted contact and found his way to the Critical Care ward. He opened the door to room number 5-13 and entered slowly. Subject Hannah...no, his wife, Hannah Longbottom, looked at peace.

Neville read the Healer's notes clipped at the foot of the bed, and he clenched his jaw. *Terminal*. He checked his watch. *There's still time*. And he mixed the contents in the syringe with the special potion in the black jar.

Neville wiped clean her face, tattooed with useless healing runes, and inserted the syringe through her nose until it pierced her brain. With great care he injected the sparkly red solution.

He waited patiently, chanting as he waved his wand over her still form.

Perseverance was rewarded when Hannah's eyes snapped open and her chest heaved. Her lungs drew in the sweet air as if for the first time. That familiar rosy colour returned to her once blue lips. The purple spidery veins that imbued her flesh yielded to newly oxygenated pink tissue.

Her vision came into focus, and she regarded her husband's loving eyes. "Nevy?"

"Hello, sleepy head."

"How long have I been out?"

"Oh, not too long."

Hannah sat up and winced. Her hands found her empty belly. "Where's the baby?"

"The baby is... tired." Neville sat beside her so she could rest her head upon his chest. "Try not to worry."

Hannah nestled in his embrace. "Why is your heart beating so fast?"

"Is it? I didn't notice." Neville's bottom lip trembled at the sight of the ominous spidery veins advancing along her shoulder. He casually waved his wand and they retreated.

"Why does everything seem so far away? I don't even remember the delivery. Tell me; what did we have?" Her eyes started to glaze.

Ever so gently, the tip of his wand graced her forehead, and the light in her eyes returned. "You made the most beautiful baby girl."

"Oh." She casually wiped away his tears. "I'm sorry, Nevy."

"Whatever for?"

"I know how much you wanted a son."

"Silly girl. Nothing that comes from you could possibly disappoint me." The purple horde of veins advanced, relentless, paying no further heed to Neville's healing charms. The wand quivered in his unsteady hand.

"You're always so sweet." She took his hand in hers. "We... can try again." Her breathing became raspy and laboured. "When... do you think... I can see the baby?"

"You'll be seeing her soon. I promise." He waved his wand over her lips and kissed them. "I love you, Hannah Longbottom."

"I love you... Neville...."

He laid her head back on the pillow.

...oOo...

Wyston loosened the collar of his uniform. Even after all these years, the loyal house-elf was still not accustomed to wearing proper clothes. Nevertheless, he indulged his master on account of his membership into that dreadful SPEW society. After all, it is an elf's mandate to obey his master.

But what is an elf to do when his master slowly destroys himself?

Wyston balanced the breakfast tray in one hand and knocked on the door. "Master Neville, breakfast is served."

"Come."

Wyston stepped into the study. His master was seated with his back to him, staring blankly at a chalkboard marked with inscrutable writings, his hands lightly steeped at the fingertips. Papers were strewn about and covered much of the floor. The elf regarded last night's dinner tray...frowning because the food had hardly been touched...and he replaced it with the fresh breakfast tray, carefully arranging the day's post next to the glass of orange juice.

On his egress, he set down last night's dinner tray, compelled to kneel in order to pick up the porcelain shards scattered along the baseboard...remnants of Mistress Augusta's priceless antique vase. He deposited the pieces on the unused tray.

The weight of the air in the room forced the elf to swallow before asking, "Is there any news of Mistress Hannah? Did it work?"

"No." Neville's tone was flat. "It didn't work, but it did stabilize her."

"At least there's that." His task completed, he started for the dinner tray, when Neville's sharp rebuke stilled him.

"Wyston!"

"Sir?"

For the first time, Neville regarded the elf. Looking uncharacteristically dishevelled, he pointed to the post left on the breakfast tray saying, "I thought I made it clear that I am not to be disturbed, not by visitors *nor* correspondence."

"Forgive me. I forgot myself, Master Neville." The elf nimbly retrieved the post, but in his haste, one of the letters fell from the stack and inadvertently landed in Neville's lap. "Oh, how clumsy of me..."

Neville regarded the letter; his eyes widened in recognition of the familiar sigil imprinted on the envelope. "Hogwarts...." He opened it and arched a curious eyebrow as he read on.

Wyston respectfully approached. "Not more bad news, I hope? Shall I dispose of it?"

"No... there appears to be a misunderstanding." Neville paused, as his eyes ventured lower down the page. "The headmaster wants to interview me for a teaching position, even though I've made no such inquiries."

"Perhaps it is Providence, sir?"

The master eyed his faithful servant. "Nonsense." And his chair creaked as he rose to his feet. "Wyston, be a good elf and fetch my travelling cloak"...he rubbed his chin..."and my razor."

Wyston bowed and obeyed. The elf waited until his back was to Master Neville before allowing a smile to visit his lips. He left the study and proceeded to the foyer afore the foot of the staircase, greeting Mistress Augusta as he passed. Once upstairs, he took a detour to his private quarters. Last week's edition of *The Daily Prophet* lay uncurred on his desktop bearing the headline:

Hogwarts' Beloved Professor, Pomona Sprout, Retires

Wyston opened the small desk drawer and retrieved the stamp of the Longbottom crest...the same stamp that he used to reply to all those letters of condolence on behalf of his master. He was remiss in returning it, but confident that he could slip it back into the study with Master Neville none the wiser. On his way out, he tossed the old newspaper into the rubbish bin; it landed atop a rough draft of a Letter of Interest addressed to one Minerva McGonagall, Headmistress of Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Sometimes a master needs prodding.