

Euphorbia milii-dualis: tickled-pink thorny spurge

by beaweasley2

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Chapter 1 of 1

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It was a beautiful day in Hogsmeade. The birds were singing, the cobblestone street was lined with spring flowers, and even the trees were lush with spring colors. In the window boxes on the store fronts and in various planters, a variety of narcissus, irises and tulips were in bloom among the lion-faced dandy-lyons, primroses and the playful peek-in-boos. Several of the shops even had honking daffodils, singing pandyills and tinkling truly-bells, and along the fences, daisies, climbing jasmine, roses, lilacs and always and forever added their perfume to the sweet spring air. For late March, it was a perfect time to be in Hogsmeade, and Ginny had anticipated this weekend trip for a while now.

However, it wasn't for the flowers, or for a chance to get away from the castle, or for a break from studying for her N.E.W.T. level classes, or even for a butterbeer, that had Ginny excited with anticipation for this weekend at Hogsmeade. Ginny wanted to give her brothers, Fred and George, a unique and interesting birthday gift. But so far things were not going quite as she planned.

Ginny was racking her brain trying to think what would make a good gift for her brothers' birthday. Now that Fred and George had their own business, they were making very good money now days, and it seemed to Ginny that the Galleons were rolling in for them. Thus her brothers had become fairly hard to buy for. *Anything that they need or want they just buy themselves*, she sighed. Not only that, but she was in her seventh year of school, and therefore didn't have all that much money to spend on gifts. That made her options limited.

Fred and George have been extremely generous to me for both my birthday and Christmas Ginny recalled. *What is left of the large box of cleverly packaged Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes products I got for my birthday to enjoy at school is still well hidden in my trunk. And the deluxe box of Weasleys' Wild-Fire Whiz-Bang fireworks they sent me for Christmas had been really fun.* Ginny had wanted, of course, to set them all off at once, but Professor McGonagall, now headmistress of Hogwarts, clamped down on that idea that morning at breakfast. *She did, however, give me permission to set a few of them off for New Year's Eve, at least*

Ginny laughed at that memory as she stood before Maggs n' Charms Gift Shop, looking in the window. *That meeting in her office was certainly memorable!* Professor McGonagall had been quite stern in the fact that Ginny could only set off six, less than half the box! But the glint in her eyes turned into a twinkle when she asked that Ginny, "Save the other half for the end of March, shall we? We'll make a special exception then, all right? Make it a special occasion."

Ginny smiled inwardly. *Probably as a tribute to the time Fred and George set off a box of them in the castle to annoy Umbridge!* It had been even more of a surprise New Year's Eve when Professors McGonagall, Flitwick and Calestra kept hitting the Weasleys' Wild-Fire Whiz-Bang fireworks with the Stunning spell, causing some

spectacular explosions and also the Vanishing spell, to make them multiply. Her six little Wild-Fire Whiz-Bangs became quite a show that lasted nearly half the night, to the delight and amazement of everyone who had spent the holiday in the safety of the school.

Ginny strolled around Hogsmeade, going to one shop after another. She stopped to look in the windows, before entering to browse through the products and feeling like she was wasting her time each time she walked out again.

Ginny spent a considerable time in the re-opened Zonko's, but the shop was only carrying its usual items, proven students' favorites and not much that was new and exciting. Ginny did buy two pockets full of Stink-Pellets and Dungbombs, as well as handfuls their only 'new' product, Snap-Crackers. *Have to keep up the Weasley traditions after all, Ginny thought as she concealed them carefully in her inside pockets. Not as loud or clever as Fred and George's Decoy Detonators, but what the heck. They are supposed to make a series of snaps and cracks for one to two minutes each. If I can't find anything else, I could just send Fred and George some of these with a singing Howler.* Ginny giggled at the thought. *Fred and George got so many Howlers at school they probably missed getting them!*

Ginny left Zonko's with even less money than before and far fewer ideas. *Quills? No. Maybe something from Honeydukes? No. I still have the boxes of sweets from my last Hogsmeade weekend. Besides that's what I sent my brothers, all of them, for Christmas! A scarf or maybe a pair of gloves? Who am I kidding?* She stood at the side of the street, looking down the rows of shops, reflecting on the ones she hadn't been in and wondering if she should bother.

"Hi, Ginny," came a shy voice from behind her.

"Neville!" Ginny spun around in surprise and saw Neville standing behind her. He was holding a large flat box of orchid-looking plants with large pleated leaves and silvery, magenta flowers that were giving off a light tinkling sound as the box shifted. "Hi! What are you doing here?"

"I'm headed to Madame Puddifoot's to deliver these bleatilla bells," he said as he balanced the tray to get a better grip. "Are you having fun in Hogsmeade today?" The corner of Neville's tray dipped and Ginny reached out a hand to steady it for him. "Thanks."

"Not really," she replied. "Why don't I walk with you? I'm not finding what I want anyway, and it's nice to see you. So, what have you been doing since Hogwarts?"

Neville smiled, pleased. "My Gran set me up with my own shop! It's a small nursery. Oh, and my Great Uncle Algie helped me buy a cottage with a bit of land. So now I have a garden and a greenhouse too for my plants."

Ginny was happy for him. *Neville always liked rare and magical plants. Herbology had been his favorite subject in school!* "That's great, Neville. I hope it's going well for you."

"Thanks," he said. "How is school this year? I heard about the changes. Aurors are taking turns teaching Defense Against the Dark Arts now, aren't they?"

Ginny nodded. "Yes. Mostly they are ones that have just finished Auror training, or are about to retire. And a few have come out of retirement just to be at the school. Professor McGonagall set it up with the Ministry."

"With Professor McGonagall now officially headmistress, who is head of Gryffindor?" he asked, shifting the box to avoid another student passing by.

"It's Hagrid," Ginny replied. "He was really honored when Professor McGonagall asked him."

Ginny held the door to Madam Puddifoot's open for him and waited inside until Neville finished his business. A witch in bright yellow robes, decorated with elaborate embroidery of white roses on her collar, nearly ran over to Neville, clamping her hands together excitedly. Madam Puddifoot wore her hair up in her usual shiny black knot, but today she'd added a large white rose, which made Ginny smile. The woman was obviously very pleased with the bleatilla bells as she scurried around, showing them off to her customers. She almost paid Neville twice, *which of course Neville's too honest to accept* Ginny admired that about her friend, laughing as she watched him hand back the extra payment.

Once back out in the street, Neville stopped to face her. "So, it is really nice to see you, Ginny..."

"Nice to see you too," she said, smiling. "So, are you off then?"

"No, well... yes. I wanted to pick up a new pair of dragon hide gloves and a pair armguards. But... I suppose you have someone here you want to catch up with?" he asked with a hopeful look as he shoved his hands into his pockets.

Neville has always liked me. He knew I liked Harry Potter in school, everyone knew... But it is good to see him again! "No, I don't actually," she replied. "I came down to see if I could find something to get Fred and George for their birthday. But I didn't find anything..." Ginny's gaze traveled down the row of shops she had been in earlier. "I suppose I wanted to find something... unique."

"For Fred and George?" Neville looked at her smiling. "Would you maybe consider a plant?"

Ginny turned back to Neville with a questioning look. "I don't think my brothers are all that good with plants. They don't have any in their flat."

"I have a plant they might like. How about a Euphorbia milii-dualis? You might know it by the name tickle-pink thorny spurge. It usually grows in sheltered places and doesn't like to be disturbed much. But the sap is used in potions, and the blooms are highly prized for the nectar," he said. "I found a bunch of the plants on a hike and managed to get quite a few of them home. I know, well, I think, that it might be something both Fred and George would like to have."

"What does the sap do? Wait a minute... Euphorbia, isn't that used to make Euphoria potion?" Ginny said. "I think Professor Slughorn mentioned it in class."

Neville shook his head, grinning. "Well, no, the sap is used in purgative or laxative potions. It's the nectar that's used in Euphoria potion. It's also used to make potions for an increased energy level and for depression. Both the sap and nectar are too potent in their natural states, but since your brothers are inventors they may like the plant. That and the sap excreted from the needles is highly irritating, and can cause blisters... although, if the plant is agitated too much, the sap can be poisonous... But I'm sure they can handle the plant fine. Look at some of the stuff they used in their Snackboxes."

"Neville, it would be wonderful! Thank you, it's perfect," Ginny said, giving Neville a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

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Both Fred and George were startled as the fireplace erupted in green flame. Fred jumped up holding his wand ready as Ginny stepped into their flat carrying a large covered hamper. She had tied a large red bow around the hamper to keep the lid in place and needles were poking in and out between gaps of the weave. Ginny was wearing her thick dragon hide gloves and her Gryffindor Quidditch team armguards, obviously to protect herself from the dangerous projectiles.

"Ginny!" Fred exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"Happy birthday!" she said, beaming. "I wanted to bring this here in person before all your friends came by."

"You are giving us a hamper that attacks?" Fred asked, not willing to get to close to the basket. "Why in the world would we want that?"

"Why would we want what?" George asked, settling himself back into his favorite chair. Ginny carried the hamper to the sitting area and nearly dropped it on the coffee table at George's feet. He jerked his feet back, just in time to keep his feet from being poked by the sharp needles that were thrusting out through the woven hamper.

"Bloody hell, Ginny, be careful."

"Look what our sister brought *us* for our birthday," Fred said, bemused.

"You got *that* for us?" George asked, pointing, as Fred stared down at the hamper. "Oh, you shouldn't have!" The long needles were still jabbing in and out of the hamper's top and sides, making the hamper quiver.

"What is in there, Ginny?" they asked in chorus, alarmed.

Ginny could barely contain her excitement. "Well, go on then, open it!"

"No way," Fred said, as George said simultaneously. "You must be kidding!"

"I'm not touching *that* until you tell me what *it* is," George said incredulously.

"Tell me what's in there, first," Fred said, his arms crossed, leaning over the hamper.

Ginny laughed. "And to think I always thought that you two weresooo brave." She pulled the end of the ribbon to release the bow. "Neville found it and gave it to me. Euphorbia milii-dualis!" she said, lifting off the lid. Noticing the blank look on their faces, she added, "It's also called tickle-pink thorny spurge." She looked at the angry plant, then at her brothers, beaming.

"Whoa, no way!" Fred said, now amazed.

"Is it really? Wow! Ginny, that's so cool!" George said, leaning forward to stare at the plant.

The leaves were fleshy, lance shaped, deep green with a silvery-green sheen and slightly serrated edges. The thick stems were covered with long, jabbing needles flailing about and jabbing at the hamper's sides. There were clusters of flowers on several spikes, in variegated yellows to dark pink on its petals.

"None of the owls at school would deliver the hamper, so Hagrid let me use the school's Floo," Ginny explained. "I told him that Neville had given me this Euphorbia milii-dualis to give to you for your birthday, but I had no way of getting it to you. So he said I could come for a brief visit."

"You'll have to thank him for us," Fred stated.

George shot her a quizzical look. "I'm surprised that Filch let Neville give this to you at school? Aren't all packages being checked?"

"Yeah, all that extra security and all," Fred added. "We've had to get creative with our packaging on all our mail orders because of it."

Ginny giggled. "Neville brought it to the Greenhouses to show Professor Sprout, first. I met up with him there. Professor Sprout really liked the plant, so Neville promised to bring her a few of them."

Ginny reached into the hamper, removed the plant and placed it on the table. Even as Ginny took off her dragon hide gloves, the plant began to clam down, and the long needles receded to sharp thorns along the stems. Pulling a palm-sized vial from her pocket, Ginny drank the pale green liquid.

"I wanted to get you something neat... you know unique. Neville wanted me to tell you happy birthday, by the way! He said you could keep the hamper his gift to you. Oh, I almost forgot, so did Hagrid. He sent this for you." She pulled out a hastily wrapped lump of rock cakes and handed them to George. He unwrapped the hard cakes, checking out the lumpy cakes and then promptly dropped them into the hamper.

"Guess what? Tomorrow night I get to fire off the rest of your fireworks! Professor McGonagall let me set off some for New Year's, I'm sure I told you." Ginny was smiling wickedly. "She asked me to save the rest for the end of the month, to commemorate... a *special day*."

"A special day?" Fred asked.

"You know, the day you stood up to Umbridge and her decree number twenty- seven, or was it twenty-eight... anyway, and you set the castle ablaze?" Ginny said, proudly.

"That was a proud moment," George stated.

"Took in thirty-nine orders for boxes of Weasleys' Wild-Fire Whiz-Bangs that night in the common room. The next day, we had lots of orders from students in the other houses as well!" Fred said proudly. "Have to admit, sales for our Wild-Fire Whiz-Bangs is always good around the holidays."

"Is April Fool's Day now an official holiday?" Ginny asked with the slightest of winks. She wiped some perspiration from her forehead with her sleeve, beginning to feel hot. "I think you'd like the memorial Professor Flitwick left in your honor, too. Remember your swamp? It's still there on the fifth floor in the east wing, all nicely roped off with a little plaque next to it. Umbridge's old door is set up in the corridor too. You two are legends, you know." They were staring at her as Ginny laughed.

"Ginny, would you like some water or anything?" George asked, noticing she was looking a bit peaked.

"Yes, I think I would..." However, when she removed her Gryffindor Quidditch arm guards, there were angry looking purple and yellow welts already forming on her forearms.

Fred also noticed that Ginny wasn't looking too good. "Gin, maybe you should sit down?" She was becoming very pale and looked sweaty.

Ginny felt really light headed, almost like she might faint. "Fred..." she said, "I need peppermint. Neville said to take peppermint if I broke out..."

"I'll be right back." Fred said and immediately Apparated down to their workroom. He rifled through the storage cabinet until he found the peppermint. He grabbed the bottle of peppermint extract and some fresh peppermint leaves off the drying rack and Apparated back to the sitting room.

"Ginny, here take this..." Fred said giving her the peppermint extract first. Ginny took a mouthful, but she didn't feel too much better.

"I need more of the antidote," she said as the room seemed to tip and turn. George grabbed her as she swayed, helping to steady her. "Neville said he'd give me more antidote if I needed... he made for..."

"Antidote? Ginny, what antidote?" George asked, "Is there more in your pocket?"

"No. I took that... Neville... he has it... he made for me..." Ginny mumbled as the room spun, and her knees gave way as everything around her became unfocused. George caught her just before she hit the floor, barely conscious.

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Fred left the Longbottoms' and Apparated directly to Neville's shop. The young witch watering the plants dropped her watering can as Fred suddenly appeared. She let out a startled scream, then managed to compose herself enough to ask, "Can I help you?" still sounding terrified.

"Neville, where's Neville Longbottom?" Fred barked, looking around wildly. *Don't panic, Weasley. He's not here...*

"I'm sorry, sir," she answered, her voice sounding as if she was desperately trying to remain calm. "Mr. Longbottom is out at the moment..."

"If Neville had an antidote where would it be?" Fred asked, interrupting her.

"Storeroom, labeled. Why?"

"My sister a plant Neville gave her..." Fred said, bearing down on the girl. "It attacked her. She's really sick..."

"What plant? Do you know which one?" she asked, her voice calm, but her eyes looked worried.

"She called it... Oh... yeah, Euphorbia mili do is something... tickle pink... thorns it has thorns!" He couldn't stand still, and he opened and closed his hands nervously.

"Did she call it Euphorbia mili-dualis?" she asked, "or tickle-pink thorny spurge?" Fred stopped his pacing, nodding, and watched the girl's face blanch. Her eyes grew large in surprise, her eyebrows rising so that they disappeared under her fringe.

The girl didn't wait for him to voice an answer. She turned and ran for the back of the shop. Fred followed her into the storeroom. It was neat, tidy and organized, everything clearly labeled. "Was it the girl Mr. Longbottom knew from school? The pretty one, with red hair?"

Fred nodded dumbly and then choked out a muted, "Yes."

"Mr. Longbottom was worried about her... he made extra just in case..." she said as she scanned the shelves. "Said he shouldn't have given her the plant unless she had dragon scale armguards. Did she wear dragon scale armguards?"

"She didn't," Fred said, now worried. "Is Euphorbia poisonous?"

"Euphorbia mili-dualis when angry *is* poisonous," she said as she searched the shelves. "But we have the antidote here, somewhere. I've been poked too. Here..." She found a box with several medium sized bottles and set it on the counter, selecting a bottle which had a note tied to it. "Take this. Make her drink at *least* a spoon-full. If she has passed out, force it down her throat if you can. She'll need a large spoonful, every hour. Three... she will need at least three doses. If she has a bad out-break of blisters, she needs this every hour until the blisters disappear. But this will help her..." Fred grabbed the bottle. "I've been poked many times myself, *this works...*" she called after him, just before Fred Apparated home.

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George got Ginny to swallow more of the peppermint extract. He had laid her down on the sofa; after magically transforming it into something resembling a bed. Ginny's arms and torso, from waist to chest, were spotted with new welts and large, vivid purple and yellow blisters now.

He'd been giving her as much of the peppermint extract as she could swallow, but looking at the bottle, it was empty now. He dabbed at her forehead with a cool cloth not knowing what else to do. *What is taking so long?* He wanted to run off and see if he couldn't find Neville faster. *But I don't want to leave Ginny alone, either.* He wanted to take Ginny to St. Mungo's, *but if Neville has the antidote, I should wait until Fred gets back with it. But where is he?*

When Fred suddenly appeared, George looked at him worried. "The girl at Neville's shop said to give her a spoonful of this..." Fred said, grabbing a spoon from the kitchen. "How bad is she?"

"It's getting worse," George replied. "Did you see Neville?"

"No, he wasn't there. The girl in his shop seemed to know about the plant though," he said as he scooted quickly to Ginny's side. "Is she conscious?"

"Yes... barely. She broke out in blisters," George replied, deeply concerned. "They spread all over her."

Fred knelt down next to Ginny's head. "I was afraid of that. She mentioned blisters," he said, pouring the liquid on the spoon. "Ginny? Can you hear me? Drink this... it will make you feel better."

Ginny let out a moan as Fred poured a large spoonful of the liquid down her throat. "How long do you think it will take?" George asked, worried. "Should we take her to St. Mungo's?" Ginny's breathing already sounded better, stronger. George touched her forehead. "She's still hot."

"Let's give this a try first," Fred said, watching Ginny's face. "The girl at the shop said to give her this every hour until the blisters go away. I think she said she had been poked by the same plant, just before I Apparated out." Fred gave Ginny another spoonful. "Just in case."

George nodded, brushing Ginny's hair from her forehead. Ginny was showing instant improvement, and within several, very long minutes, she opened her eyes.

An hour later, and another dose of the antidote, she no longer looked as pale and sweaty. George wiped her forehead again with the cool cloth, but she didn't feel as hot now.

After another long hour, and after Fred gave her another dose, Ginny was able to sit up, although she still felt woozy. Some of the welts, however, looked like they were getting smaller.

"Geeze, sis! You gave us quite a scare," George said softly.

"Blimey, Ginny, what were you thinking!" Fred said, the tension easing from his voice. "I thought I'd lost you!"

"Not the kind of reaction I was hoping for," she said weakly. "I just wanted to give you something unique. A present you'd never forget."

"Oh, we're not likely to forget this one," George said, finally smiling.

"Yeah, you don't have to kill yourself over us," Fred said. "Next time just send us a book."

"Or a card," George said. "I'd rather have my sister in one piece."

"And alive," Fred added. Ginny reached up and hugged them both in turn, her eyes brimming with grateful and happy tears.

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Neville's note on the bottom of the hamper read:

Fred and George,

Happy birthday to both of you.

Handle this plant with extreme care. Dragon hide gloves and dragon scale arm guards should be worn when moving the plant, re-planting or trimming, unless you use magic to replant.

To extract the Euphorbiaceae nectar, simply tickle nectarines with the tip of a silver spoon, delicately. The sap from the stems can be pressed from clippings. You can also collect the sap from the needles by teasing the needles with a small sponge and let the plant stab it. I suggest you use forceps and please, be careful to not anger the plant.

If poked with the needles, take raw peppermint extract immediately. If blisters start to form, you must take an antidote. I have put some in the hamper for you. I put directions for the antidote on the bottle. If you need more antidote, use a sponge to extract as much of the sticky white sap as you can from the needles and take it to a potions brewer.

I hope you enjoy the plant,

Neville Longbottom

There was a page copied from a Herbology book with the letter:

Euphorbia milii-dualis: a very rare European variety of wood spurge, typically found in mountainous ranges. The nectar is used in making Euphoria potion and anti-depressants, and the sap from the stems is used for purgative and laxative potions.

This plant is distinguished by its thick, woody, succulent stems of dark brownish-grey, profusely covered with sharp thorns, and lance-shaped, fleshy leaves, which are deep slivery-green with undersides in varied shades of purple. The leaves have serrated edges with sharp, tiny needle-like points. Immature leaves are bright to deep green with a slivery-green sheen as purpling color develops a plants mature.

The plant flowers nearly all year, producing several stems with many flower clusters, especially in the winter. The flowers are small and have nectarines that will produce abundant amounts of Euphorbiaceae nectar when the plant is happy. The individual flowers sit just above brightly colored modified leaves (bracts) that are variegated dark pink to yellow at the petal-like tips and are quite attractive.

But when the plant is disturbed, its thorns will elongate into long needles and will exude a sticky, whitish sap that is a terrible skin irritant, and when the plant is angry, this sap can become poisonous. The stems of the *Euphorbia milii-dualis* when they are seedlings are covered with tiny hairs, which do produce an extremely skin irritating sap and which are toxic, but not poisonous to humans.

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Author's note:

Bletilla is an actual plant species of orchid. *Bletilla* is a temperate genus of orchids containing 9 species found through China, Japan and Taiwan and are really quite beautiful.

Euphorbia or *Euphorbiaceae* is a genus of Spurge with 2,000 species of plants. *Euphorbia milii* is an actual variety of this species, however tickle-pink *Euphorbia milii-dualis*, as a species, is completely from my imagination.

Both plant species can be found listed in Wikimedia.com or on Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia web site.

Special thanks to my beta Phoenix for all her diligent work and her great suggestions. You make my stories so much better.