A Life In Your Shape

by SeeFin

Summary

Neville moved in early on a Wednesday morning in the rain, waking Harry up while he was at it.

Notes

I love it when you call my name

See the end of the work for more notes

1.

Harry was reading in a dusty corner of the library when the summons came, from a portrait far above his head.

“‘The headmistress wants you,’” the Lady told him, from the back of a dark horse. He’d never heard her voice before, and when he looked up to acknowledge her she was already riding away, retreating further and further into her green hills.

McGonagall’s office was nearer to the great hall than Dumbledore’s had been, and unlike him she actually kept visiting hours. The door to her office was thick and wooden, and Harry stared at the piece of browned parchment with her name on it for a few moments before knocking. He always felt as though he was about to get in trouble, coming down here, and doubted he’d ever grow out of it.

She looked up at him when he opened the door, putting aside her quill. “Harry,” she said warmly.
“I hope I didn’t take you away from something important.”

“No,” he said, honestly. Classes weren’t starting for three weeks, and he was almost done with his lesson plans for the first term. “I was reading.”

“Anything good?” she asked, and gestured for him to sit down. A fire was burning in the grate beside them, the windows wide open to let in the breeze and the sound of birdsong.

“A muggle author,” Harry told her, “science fiction. There are loads of them in the library, I didn’t realise.”

A bird landed on her windowsill with a busy, fluttering noise, and they both turned to watch it for a moment as it cleaned one of its wings. “I have to ask you something,” McGonagall said, and the bird startled into flight.

“Okay,” Harry said warily, and she laughed.

“Don’t look at me like that,” she said, “It’s nothing bad, I hope. I don’t know if you’ve heard, but Professor Sprout is taking on an apprentice, since she’s going to be retiring soon. I think she’s hoping to train someone up for her job.”

“I hadn’t,” Harry told her, moving his feet further away from the fire. They were starting to actively sweat. “Who is it?”

“Mr. Longbottom,” McGonagall said, smiling. “He’s coming back from Iceland. We were lucky to get him, by all accounts he’s been doing some wonderful work out there.”

The last time Harry had seen Neville had been at a Christmas party some years ago at the Burrow. They exchanged owls, occasionally, but maybe not enough. “That’s great news,” Harry agreed.

McGonagall nodded, and then tilted her head to the side. “We are, however, slightly running out of room in the teacher’s wing.”

“Oh,” Harry said, because he had a spare room in his apartment in the tower, and he could see where this was going. “You want us to share? I don’t mind, Neville and I used to be roommates.”

McGonagall looked grateful. “I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t necessary,” she said, which Harry didn’t doubt. “And once Pomona leaves then we’ll be able to do some reshuffling, but that tower has had about three too many extension charms placed on it already, and I think another set of rooms would be too much of a stretch, unfortunately.”

Harry nodded. The sky outside had been steadily turning pink as they spoke, and there wasn’t a single cloud on the horizon. The tiny diamond panes in the windows had gone all golden and sunlit, glittering in the evening light. Harry thought for a second about how he was going to persuade Draco to go for a walk around the grounds after dinner.

“It’s okay,” he said, turning his attention back to McGonagall. “I don’t really need that much space.”

2.

Neville moved in early on a Wednesday morning in the rain, waking Harry up while he was at it. When all the students came back from their summer holidays Harry would have to start waking up
at six again, just so he could fit breakfast in before classes started. But for now he was making the most of the time he had, the peace in the castle before it was filled again with teenagers.

Neville was standing in the middle of the living room when Harry came in, and was dripping water all over the red rug underneath the coffee table. Not that Harry cared very much; it had already been here when he'd moved in.

“Hey,” Harry said, and then yawned widely enough that his jaw clicked in protest.

Neville smiled, broad and bright, and then stepped forward as if to clap his hands on Harry’s shoulders, before lowering them when he apparently thought better of it. His hair was in his face, and his jumper was stuck flat against his skin, soaked completely through.

“Hey,” he said warmly. “I was going to hug you, but I probably shouldn’t.”

“Yeah,” Harry said, and stretched his arms above his head. “Please don’t.”

Neville laughed. “It’s so good to see you,” he said.

Harry dropped his hands down to his sides. “It’ll be just like old times,” he said. “Do you still fall asleep anywhere the mood takes you?”

“I have not yet grown out of that particular habit,” Neville said solemnly. “Sorry in advance.”

“Have you eaten?” Harry asked, going over to open the curtains. The sky was dark and grey, with only the smallest hint of blue sitting right on the horizon, way beyond the Quidditch pitch. “Do you want some breakfast?”

“Yeah, thank you, that would be brilliant,” Neville said, shaking his head like a dog, droplets flying everywhere. One landed on Harry’s bottom lip, freezing cold, and before Harry could think it through, he caught it beneath his tongue.

"Actually," Neville said, "could you tell me which room is mine? I still have a load of cases to bring up from downstairs."

Harry nodded, unable to find his voice for a moment. “It’s down the hall,” he said, pointing, “the one that doesn’t have anything in it, I moved all my stuff out.”

“Brilliant,” Neville said again, and took one step backwards towards the door. “I’d better go and get my things.”

“Alright,” Harry agreed. “I’ll-- boil some eggs. Or did you want some help?”

“I’ll manage,” Neville said, and grinned. “I can do magic, you might have heard.”

Neville was a while moving his stuff in, a steady stream of potted plants and leather suitcases floating past the kitchen door as Harry grilled some tomatoes and made some toast. “Do you want coffee?” he called to Neville, on his third trip, a brown cardboard box in his hands.

“Yes please,” Neville said, and then caught his elbow on the doorframe, distracted. “Fuck,” he said, laughing down the hallway.

He looked older, spoke differently, had grown both taller and wider in the time since they’d last seen each other. He had a deep, thick scar on his forearm. Harry didn’t know what to do with it, he hadn't been expecting to-- find Neville the way that he now found him.
Later, Neville cracked open the top of his boiled egg, and then put his spoon down. “I hope this is okay,” he said. They were at the kitchen table, sat across from one another, drinking long-life orange juice out of some mugs that Harry had had to spell clean. His place wasn’t the tidiest, but Neville didn’t seem to mind.

“The room sharing. Apartment sharing, whatever. I know it was just you before,” Neville continued.

Harry shrugged, and looked at a mole on Neville’s neck. “I don’t mind having someone here,” he said. “It was kind of boring before.”

“I think I might be boring,” Neville confessed. “Lots of plant talk.”

“That’s okay,” Harry replied, and put a whole tomato into his mouth, let it burst over his tongue. “As long as you don’t mind listening to me talk about Defence all the time.”

Neville laughed, like Harry was ridiculous. “I have never once had a problem with that,” he said.

3.

A few days later Harry woke in thin light, to the sound of the dawn chorus. A thick layer of mist covered the grounds, and when he stuck his head out of his bedroom window the air was already warm and damp. He breathed in a few times, so deep that his lungs hurt, and saw the sunlight hit the tops of the far off mountains, bathing them in gold.

At breakfast, which they’d taken to eating together, Neville suggested they go for a walk around the lake. There was a track all the way around one side which led to a series of other, bigger lochs, the further you went into the mountains. Ones you could find on a map, with proper names. Luna had found the path one day, overgrown and untended, when she’d been wandering about the grounds waiting for a Quidditch match to finish.

Harry made them marmite sandwiches and put them in his satchel, with two packets of crisps, two red apples, and some jam tarts sent up from the kitchens, wrapped in waxy, brown paper. While he was putting his shoes on Neville filled a glass water bottle, then looked out of the window for a moment before filling a second one he’d retrieved from his room.

They left the windows wide open when they went out, so that it would be cool when they came back.

Harry had never seen the path, only heard about it from Ginny, so Neville had to lead them both to it. The lakeshore was bare and sandy for a long stretch, and they walked close to the water for a time, the small waves lapping at Harry’s walking boots every so often. Eventually they came to the edge of a forest. A knotty, barbed-wire fence cut through the trees and disappeared into the water, so they had to turn and walk next to it until they came to a stile, and a tiny dirt path.

“I don’t know where that way goes,” Neville said, climbing over and waiting on the other side for Harry. “I think it must go around the borders of the castle.”

“We’ll go that way another day,” Harry replied.

After almost an hour of walking the trees started thinning out, until they were on the other side of the forest without even realising it, looking out over wide fields dotted with sheep and edged with crumbling stone walls. Water shimmered in the distance, in a valley between two low mountains,
so small as to be almost verging on hills. A path wound its way up the face of one, along the side of a rushing waterfall.

Harry nodded his head at the flat path that led to the edge of the lake. “Let’s go this way,” he said, and Neville nodded in agreement, pausing to take a drink of water.

He walked ahead of Harry through the green fields, stopping once or twice to look closely at flowers that were growing through the gaps in the stone wall. They’d brought jumpers with them in case it got cold later, even though at this point in time Harry doubted it ever would, and Neville had tied his around his waist, underneath the base of his yellow backpack. Harry’s t-shirt was sticking to his back, and he kept having to pull it away from his skin.

“It’s too hot,” Neville said, breathless, when they collapsed on a patch of warm grass beside the loch. Harry couldn’t stop looking at the water, clear and cool-looking and stony at the bottom.

“Fuck it,” Harry said, and stood up. “You want to swim?”

Neville was red, but he’d been red all day. Harry found it very charming. “I don’t have-- in our underwear?” Neville asked, hesitating.

Harry shrugged, and stripped his shirt off, turning to face the water. He took his boxers off too, leaving them close to the lapping waves. He hadn’t brought his wand, and didn’t feel like sitting around waiting for his underwear to dry once he was out.

The water was freezing, which Harry had expected, and he waded out until it was deep enough that he could dive under, his skin tightening in the cold. He surfaced further out and gasped for breath, laughing. He dove again, and this time when he came up Neville was in the water too, beside him, his hair dripping wet and his broad shoulders bare and pale. Harry kicked his foot against Neville’s knee, and Neville kicked him back, grinning, his heel thudding against Harry’s shin.

They lay back to float and Harry spread his limbs wide, his eyes watering painfully in the bright sunlight until he had to close them, and listen to the wind and the birds calling overhead. The tips of his fingers brushed against Neville’s hand, under the water. Neither of them moved for a long time.

4.

Harry went to dinner with Draco in Hogsmeade every Thursday, which usually led into drinks at one of the pubs, and sometimes going back to Draco’s rooms. Harry had gone straight home tonight though, a little unsteadily.

Neville was asleep on the sofa in the living room with the curtains wide open, blue moonlight flooding the room.

Harry touched his shoulder, gently. “Neville,” he said, his voice thick, but Neville didn’t stir. His sandy hair was fanned out across their one good cushion, and his mouth was a little bit open.

“Nev,” Harry said again, gripping his shoulder a little more insistently. “Wake up.”

Neville blinked his eyes open, and swallowed, looking up at Harry, eyes bright even in the darkness.

“What?” he asked.
“Go to bed,” Harry said, too softly.

Neville kept looking at him.

“How was dinner?”

“Nice,” Harry told him. “It’s late, though.”

The room was quiet, and so still, and Harry could hear them both breathing. Neville moved one shoulder against the cushions in a gesture that might have been a shrug, and Harry realised, abruptly, that he was still holding onto his arm. He let his hand drop away, his heart going fast.

“Okay,” Neville said tiredly, “okay,” and started to rise.

5.

“I grew up beside a lake,” Neville said, one day when they were lying in the tall grass beside one of the greenhouses. Students were arriving in a few days, and they’d both been busy with preparations. Harry had walked over from the kitchens for Neville’s lunch break at two, when the day was at its hottest, with egg sandwiches and some elderflower cordial that one of the professors had made earlier in the summer.

Harry rolled his head to the side, but Neville had one freckled arm over his eyes, shielding them from the sunlight. They were right on the edge of the shadow of a huge beech tree, so that Harry could lie in the shade and Neville could lie in the sun.

“I never even went into the countryside when I was younger,” Harry replied. “Before Hogwarts, I mean.” The Dursleys hadn’t been an outdoor sort of family, and even if they had been it was doubtful that they would have taken them with him if they’d gone anywhere.

“It was nice,” Neville said. “Not like the one here. It was tiny, too small to have waves unless the weather was really bad.”

“Did you swim?” Harry asked, swatting lazily at a bee that had started buzzing around his head. It flew off to a nearby dandelion.

“Mmm,” Neville said. “Not by myself, and my grandmother didn’t ever want to take me. But sometimes I’d go with other children who lived nearby. There was a tire swing, but you had to go pretty early in the day if you didn’t want it to be claimed by another group.”

“It sounds really nice,” Harry said, and rolled over onto his stomach. His back had started to ache from lying still for such a long time. Neville shifted, so that their shoulders were pressed together. Harry put his face into the grass and closed his eyes. It smelled wet, like earth, and the stalks weren’t yet completely dry from being in the shade for most of the day.

“The-- people that you lived with,” Neville said, eventually. “They sound terrible. I’m really sorry.”

Harry didn’t move. “Yeah,” he said. “It took me a long time to realise how terrible.”

Everyone knew about it now. The Prophet had done an article on it a while back that Harry hadn’t read. They’d talked to people who had been in his year in school, as if they’d know anything about it. Apparently they’d even tried to talk to the Dursleys. Harry didn’t think about it, if he could help
“I’m sorry,” Neville said again. Harry didn’t know how to reply, so he stayed quiet. “And I’m also sorry for bringing it up,” Neville continued.


Neville sighed. “Harry, I worry about everything.”

“Just tell me more about your lake,” Harry mumbled. They had a half hour before Neville had to get back to taming wild rice.

6.

Term started again on the second day of September, on one of the hottest days of the year so far. Nobody wore their robes around the castle, even though technically everybody was supposed to in the winter term, teachers too. Harry rolled his shirtsleeves up before he started classes with the sixth years after lunch, and opened the tall windows that led out onto the series of small balconies that hugged the side of the castle.

It was nice teaching sixth years, they weren’t as mouthy as some of the younger kids, weren’t as nervous about casting.

Neville was cleaning up when Harry got back to their rooms, late in the evening after dinner had ended. Professors were obliged to attend, but Harry hadn’t seen Neville there. He wasn’t technically a teacher though, so it was probably alright.

“Hey,” Harry said when he came in, swinging his satchel onto one of their sofas. Neville had crammed them both into the corner of the room so that he could sweep up. A couple of piles of dust still sat on the floor, waiting for him to get rid of them. “Do you want some help?” Harry asked. “How was today?”

“Yeah, it was fine,” Neville said. He’d taken a cloth to the frame of one of Harry’s photos of him and Ron and Hermione, was currently going hard at the glass.

Harry wrinkled his brow. “You don’t have to do that,” he said. “It’s got a self-cleaning charm on it, I’m pretty sure.”

“It wasn’t working,” Neville said shortly. He didn’t turn around.

Harry stood, and went to get their brush and pan from the cupboard under the sink, and cleaned up the piles of dust from the wooden floorboards. Then he moved the sofas back to their places. By the time he was done, he was sweating again, even though it was dark outside and the room was on its way to being a normal temperature.

He sat down on the sofa again, and picked a little bit at the corduroy covering. He wasn’t sure what the protocol here was, he hadn’t had a roommate since he’d lived with Ron and Hermione after the war, and that had been years ago.

He watched Neville’s back move as he worked, the way his shoulders stretched out the thin t-shirt he wore when he was doing something messy in the greenhouse. Harry looked at his thick forearms, his solid thighs, just for a moment, and just long enough to feel bad for looking. Then he made them both a cup of pale, sugary tea.
“Did something happen?” Harry asked, placing Neville’s mug down onto a side table beside his knee.

“No,” Neville said. He put his cloth down and picked up the tea instead, and then perched on the arm of the sofa, at the furthest possible point from where Harry was sitting. “Not-- nothing happened. A few first years had some questions about the war. The Battle.”

“Right,” Harry said. He was used to that kind of thing by now, but Neville had been away for such a long time that he’d maybe never gotten a chance to. “It wears off after a while, further into the term.”

“When the fuck did eleven year olds get so bold,” Neville sighed, and leant his head all the way against the wall, the back of the sofa digging into his lower back. “When I was that age I couldn’t even ask second years a fucking question without pissing myself.”

“I remember,” Harry said. “You grew out of that, though.”

“I’m sure there have to be some shy first years somewhere,” Neville said, “but I didn’t encounter any today.”

“Did Professor Sprout have you teaching?” Harry asked.

Neville made a weird noise that could have meant anything.

“No,” he then said, “but she had me go around and check on their work. I took half the classroom and she took the other half.”


“You don’t teach first years, right?” Neville asked. “Maybe I should transfer.”

Harry laughed. “I wouldn’t mind. Can you cast a corporeal patronus?”

“Is that the only qualification?” Neville said, raising his eyebrows. “Low standards, Harry.”

“It’s the only standard for you,” Harry replied.

Neville burst out laughing, his cheeks going red. “Merlin,” he said, and smiled helplessly at the ceiling. “Do you want to see?”

“Yes,” Harry said. “I just didn’t want to ask outright. I felt it might be rude.”

Neville rolled his eyes and pulled his wand out of the waistband of his trousers. It took a little while for the fine, silvery mist to form something that Harry could recognise, but as soon as he did he started to laugh. He couldn’t help himself.

“I thought you were afraid of being rude,” Neville said, watching as a silvery frog hopped silently onto the coffee table in front of them. “What happened to that?”

“I love it,” Harry said, “it’s like you have another Trevor.”

“Hey,” Neville said, “Trevor was a toad. This is a common frog.”

“Did you name it?” Harry asked, reaching forward to poke at it, his finger disappearing into its forehead and coming out the other side.
“No, of course not,” Neville said, outraged and laughing still. “Why would I name it? Did you name your stag?”

Harry pulled his legs onto the sofa. “That sounds like an innuendo,” he told Neville. “No, I didn’t name it.”

Neville eyed him for a second, the barest hint of a smile on his lips. “Stop flirting with me,” he said.

Harry sat back, and took a sip of his lukewarm tea, and felt his cheeks heat up. “Alright,” he replied.

Neville snorted, shaking his head. It was an objectively unattractive sound, and yet.

7.

Harry followed Neville up the mountain path, the earth littered with ill-shaped rocks and tiny, loose pebbles that skittered down the way they’d come when he trod on them. Draco was way up ahead, out of sight in the mist, but he’d said he was going to wait at the next nice spot so they could have lunch.

Harry was a terrible hiker, not used to the kind of slow energy it required, where you had to be able to walk all day and not rely on adrenaline for any of it. Neville was better. Slow, but he could walk for hours before getting tired, whereas Harry would get thirty minutes away from the castle and want to turn back.

“Hey,” Harry panted, barely hearing his own voice, and grabbed in Neville’s direction, his hand sliding off Neville’s back. “Can we stop for a second.”

Neville turned around, nodding, and started to take Harry’s water bottle out of his backpack for him. He handed it over. “Let’s give it twenty more minutes before we stop for lunch, okay?”

“Yeah,” Harry breathed. His lungs hurt. He didn’t think his lungs were supposed to be hurting.


“This is terrible,” Harry managed. He could barely think.

Neville frowned. “Do you want to go back? I can send my patronus up to Malfoy.”

Harry shook his head again, took another slug of water. He turned to face the valley below, the green fields and the forests and the rivers, the stone houses with smoke rising from their chimneys. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d been this high up.

“Let’s keep going,” he said.

“In a minute,” Neville replied, sitting down heavily on a little rock ledge next to the path. Harry sank down next to him, half his body pushed close against half of Neville’s.

His eyes were closed when Harry tore his gaze away from the dark lake beneath them, eyelashes resting drowsily on his red cheeks. The wind smelled like earth and wet stone, and Neville’s body was the one warm spot in the cold mountain air, alive and soft, heart beating. Harry suddenly wanted so badly to graze his fingers over the back of Neville’s neck it felt almost physical, like a
firm punch right in the chest. He thought about how wonderful it would be to touch the bow of Neville’s lips with his fingertips, to kiss his temple, his hairline, the corner of his mouth. Harry leant back, winded, sharp stones digging into the heels of his hands.

“Malfoy can wait for a little while,” Neville said belatedly.

And though he knew Neville wasn’t watching him, it took all Harry had in him to nod, silently, and stare out again at the land below them.

8.

Ron and Hermione had been living in Hastings for almost three years, in an old, red-brick house with big windows that overlooked a messy garden, and black beams in the ceiling of every room. Harry kept a toothbrush in their bathroom with his name written on it, and there was a drawer in the guest room with some of his t-shirts, and a set of soft plaid pyjamas he wore whenever he stayed over. He tried to go and visit them at least once a month, especially now that they had the new baby. He hated the thought of not being able to see Rose and Hugo getting older.

Early in November Harry took the train to Edinburgh, and walked from the station up to the main portkey office, where they gave him a dirty pint glass and directed him towards one of their departure rooms. Harry stared down at the frosted toucan on the side of the glass as he waited for the portkey to activate. Then, in London, he went immediately to the bathroom and tried not to throw up. After that he deliberated for a while over whether or not he should apparate to Hastings or get a two-hour train through the damp countryside, before eventually deciding on the option that wouldn’t make him lose his breakfast.

East Sussex looked a lot like Surrey, from the window of a train. Tiny villages and tiny farmhouses and charming, two-platform stations in the middle of the countryside. He bought a tea from the trolley and watched the fields race by, the trees bare and the grass dark with rain.

The walk from the station to Ron and Hermione’s house was short, down a few side streets and through a long alley that threaded its way between closely packed back gardens. The long washing lines were bare now, but in the summer every house would have their clothes out to dry, the air smelling like laundry detergent and hot tarmac.

Their house lay at the end of a cobblestone garden path, behind a small wooden gate that creaked when Harry pushed it open with one hand, closing the latch behind him before making his way through the garden. The sound of waves crashing was filtering in through the trees, from the shoreline a minute’s walk from the back garden gate.

Hermione opened the front door when he knocked, smiling already, up to her elbows in flour. She hugged him carefully, and she smelled like roses when he kissed her cheek.

“Hi,” she said, backing up into the hall so he could get in the door, “come in. God, you’re soaked.”

“Hi,” Harry replied, taking his coat off and hanging it on their coat rack, making sure it didn’t get anything else wet. Drops of water immediately started to puddle on the wooden floor, and he did a quick heating spell under his breath, the rain evaporating away in a thin cloud of steam. “How’s everything going, you look lovely.”

She rolled her eyes, and started away down the hall. Hair was escaping from her ponytail, fizzing out around her temples. “You always think I look lovely.”
“You do always look lovely,” Harry told her, following her into the kitchen. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“Ooh,” Ron said, from beside the oven, looking up from a frying pan full of something sizzling and orange. “You’ve cut your hair. When did you cut your hair?”

Harry ran his hand over it. His skull still felt odd under his palms, bumpy in a way that he hadn’t known about before. “I don’t know,” he said, “a few weeks ago? Do you like it?”

Neville had cut it for him, in the bathroom after they should have been asleep, with scissors first and then an electric razor he’d found in the cupboard under the sink. Harry’s hair had been well on the way to shoulder-length, before that.

“It’s great,” Hermione said, and Ron nodded. “I don’t know why you did it right as we’re coming into winter, though.”

“I just felt like a change,” Harry said, yawning. “That journey fucking kills. As soon as Rose and Hugo are old enough to use a portkey you’re going to start coming to visit me again.”

Ron made a sympathetic face. “Come here,” he said, beckoning. “Do you need a hug?”

“Do you need a cup of tea?” Hermione asked, in a similar voice, right on the edge of laughter. “Do you want a nap before lunch?”

“You’re so mean to me,” Harry protested, going over to Ron anyway so that his shoulders could be crushed in a tight hug. He shook him off after almost a full minute, when the carrots started to sizzle a little more than they should have been. “Where are the babies?” he asked.

“Napping,” Hermione said. “Just while we finish cooking, and then I’ll get them up.”

“Okay,” Harry said, scrubbing at his eyes. He shook his head, trying to wake himself up. “I’m making a coffee,” he said, to the room in general, and then put the kettle on to boil.

“I’ll have a tea,” Ron said absently, trying to unstick burnt carrots from the bottom of the heavy pan. Harry had absolutely no sympathy for him whatsoever.

“Hermione?” Harry asked, and she nodded, her arms flexing as she rolled out some dough on the floured countertop. Harry couldn’t for the life of him work out what meal they were supposed to be in the process of making. “I’ll have a coffee too, please. The same way that you have it.”

After lunch, Harry sat on the sofa and held Hugo, while Hermione said something about the elevators in the Ministry. He was the smallest human Harry had ever seen, apart from Teddy when he’d been a baby, but he’d still been older than Hugo when Harry had first met him. Hugo had dark curls, and small hands with tiny fingernails that he kept clenching into a loose fist. Harry put his index finger into Hugo’s palm.

“How’s living with Neville going?” Ron asked. Rose was on his lap waving a toy cow in Harry’s direction, Hermione in the chair next to him with her feet tucked under her. Harry looked up.

“Good,” he said. “He’s a good person to share a flat with.”
Ron made a face. “He used to snore pretty badly.”

Hermione snorted. “You’re one to talk.”

Ron went bright red. “Look, I’m very self-conscious about my snoring.”

“You shouldn’t have brought it up as a negative trait then,” Harry replied, laughing. Hugo made a gurgling sound, and Harry decided it was time to stare at him a bit more.

“Well,” Ron said, disgruntled. “As long as you’re getting along.”

Harry shrugged, and looked right into Hugo’s eyes. “Do you talk to Dean much?” he asked, then glanced up at Hermione.

“Sometimes,” she said. “Not as much as I used to, since he moved to the Cardiff branch. Sometimes when he’s back for meetings we’ll go for lunch. Why? Do you?”

“What about Seamus?” Harry asked, ignoring the question. Rain was beating hard against the small panes of glass in the window behind Ron and Hermione’s backs.

“I guess,” Ron said. “He comes into the shop occasionally. I don’t think I’ve seen him since that last dinner we had a few months ago.”

“Why, Harry,” Hermione said.

Harry paused, and thought of the best way to phrase what he was about to say. “There’s something I wanted to know,” he said. “And I don’t really know how to bring it up with Neville.”

“Right,” Ron said dubiously. “What’s that then?”

Harry stroked Hugo’s hair back against his head, and then let it spring up again as he took his hand away. He’d never seen a baby with so much hair. He supposed he hadn’t really seen that many babies, come to think of it.

“I was thinking of, I don’t know,” Harry said, his cheeks heating. “I was thinking about maybe asking him out.”

“Oh,” Hermione said, relief flooding her voice. “God, I thought it was going to be something really bad. That’s great! That’s amazing!”

Harry didn’t look at her. “It’s kind of bad,” he said. “We live together. That’s bad.”

“Not if he says yes,” Ron said. “Then it’s just convenient.”

Harry ignored him, for a second time. “They’re his best friends, Dean and Seamus. I just—maybe you could do some reconnaissance for me, or something, next time you run into them. I don’t know.”

“About… if he likes men or not?” Hermione asked. “I think he does. I feel as though I heard somewhere that he does.”

“I don’t know,” Harry said, lifting one shoulder. “I always think it’s weird asking someone that.”

“No it isn’t,” Ron said. “Neville won’t care, you know what he’s like.”

“What’s he like,” Harry asked flatly.
“Non-judgemental,” Ron said, decisive.

“He was with Hannah Abbott for a bit after school,” Hermione said. “But that doesn’t mean anything. And it was years ago.”

Harry swallowed. “I really like him.”

The room was silent for a moment, and when Harry looked up they were both staring at him. Hermione was smiling, just slightly, just enough that it was tugging on the corners of her lips.

“Did you like him in school?” Ron asked curiously.

Harry laughed. “I liked Ginny in school, and I barely had time to process that, to be honest with you.”

Ron let out a sigh, and patted Rose on the head when she wriggled. “Fuck it,” Ron said solemnly. “Seriously mate, fuck it. Ask him.”

Harry’s office was the same office Lupin had had, and Lockhart, and Umbridge, which sometimes used to make him feel weird, but didn’t anymore. It had been his for more than a decade, and was filled with Quidditch brooms and old papers he’d forgotten to mark and spare robes for when he inevitably spilled tea down himself over the course of a long day. Pictures of Ron and Hermione, crayon drawings by Teddy that embarrassed the hell out of him whenever he visited for tea, a few paintings that Luna had done. A while ago Draco had gifted him a signed poster from when he’d used to play for the Tornados, back when he’d been much younger and much blonder, and insisted Harry put it above the fireplace where he could see it from his desk. And then to try and cancel that out Harry had crammed as much Harpies memorabilia onto the mantelpiece as he possibly could; including a scarf Ginny had lent him once that was going to be very valuable one day.

It barely felt like the same room that Lupin used to inhabit, shabby and tired and wearing suits that you could tell he barely tolerated. It didn’t feel like the place where Harry had picked up one of his more noticeable scars.

Harry woke up to someone knocking on his door. He blinked a few times in the watery dawn light, his cheek pressed firmly against the rough wood of his desk.

“Harry?” Neville asked, from the other side of the room, floorboards creaking under his feet as he walked over.

Harry sat up. Too fast, if the sudden dizziness was anything to go by. “Yeah,” he said, scrubbing at his eyes. He yawned widely, his jaw clicking. “I fell asleep.”

“It’s the morning,” Neville said, redundantly, since Harry was currently sitting right in the glare of the rising sun, hot on the side of his face.

“I was up late marking,” Harry said, yawning again. “I didn’t think it would take me that long.”

“I’m away for two days and look what happens,” Neville said, laughing, sitting down in one of the soft chairs on the other side of Harry’s wide desk.

“Oh,” Harry said, sitting up a bit straighter. “You’re back. Hi, sorry, it took me a second to
“Hi,” Neville said, smiling broadly. “Did you miss me?”

“You were only gone for two days,” Harry replied. “I didn’t even get a chance.”

“Liar,” Neville said, and shook his head. “Such a shitty, shitty liar.”

“It’s early,” Harry protested. “I’m not myself yet, I haven’t had a coffee.”

“You’re always a shit liar,” Neville said fondly. “Always have been.”

Harry stretched, arching his back, and watched Neville while he did it. He had on a pair of muddy wellington boots, as though he’d come directly here from a wet field, and a nice wax jacket that Harry hadn’t seen before.

“Is that new?” he asked, nodding his head towards it. “Do you want some tea?” He turned to the low side table behind him and flipped the switch down on the electric kettle he had plugged into the wall.

“Yeah,” Neville said, “I got it in a farmer’s co-op near where we were camping. Look at this.” He was unbuttoning it when Harry turned to see, and pulled it open just enough that Harry could see the cream, sheepskin lining.

“Is that real?” Harry asked.

“I don’t think so,” Neville said, his brow furrowing. “It only cost about twenty euros, so I highly doubt it. Here, feel.”

Harry reached across the desk and felt the lining of Neville’s new jacket. It was soft, and warm from Neville’s skin. “Nice,” he said, and took his hand away again. His eyes caught on the collar of Neville’s shirt, where it was open over his neck. “You can get me one next time you’re over.”

“I think I’m going again in February,” Neville said. “Maybe for a week or so, if I can get the time off.”

“Did you find anything interesting?” Harry asked, fully prepared to let Neville to launch into a description of the native plant species in the Dublin mountains while they drank their tea. Neville let his go cold while he talked.


Neville paused before answering. “No?” he said. “I don’t think so. I like it for a little bit at a time, but I got bored of it when I was in Iceland.”

“Did you run out of plants to study?” Harry asked.

Neville laughed brightly, at that. “I don’t think that’s even possible,” he said. “Anyway, no, I just felt like a change of scenery.”

Something occurred to Harry, just then. “Do you think you’ll get bored of Hogwarts?” he asked, carefully.

“I hadn’t been here since the war ended,” Neville said. “Did you know that?”

“I kind of-- assumed,” Harry replied. “I’ve been here since I quit the Aurors, so-- I think I would
have heard about it if you’d visited.”

“It’s like a completely new place,” Neville said. “And I like it a lot better than I used to. Even Malfoy’s like a different person, it’s brilliant.”

“I’m glad you like it here,” Harry said. “It’s my favourite place in the world.”

Neville shook his head, softly exasperated. “You need to get around more,” he said. “See some other castles.”

“I’m going to buy a castle when I retire,” Harry told him. “And get some greyhounds and a donkey.” *You can buy one next door, Harry wanted to say. Or you can move in too. We’ll have greyhounds, and a donkey, and a greenhouse just for you.*

Neville snorted. “What would you do with a donkey,” he said, and then reached down beside him to the floor, picking up something Harry couldn’t see. “I got you a present, by the way,” he said, and put a loaf of bread on the desk in between them. It was brown, wrapped in thin, clear plastic.

“You’re only giving this to me now because you’re hungry,” Harry said, opening it anyway. The sky was turning blue as the sun rose higher in the window, filling up the room as they talked, lighting the high ceilings and the dark floorboards.

“Do you have a toaster in here?” Neville asked, even though he knew full well that Harry didn’t.

“I don’t even have a knife,” Harry said, considering it. “Should I do a slicing spell, or just pull it apart with my bare hands.”

“Up to you,” Neville said. “It’ll taste the same either way.”

Harry broke off a wedge and handed it to Neville, and then picked a piece off for himself, the way they’d eaten loaves of bread in the summer, on the lawn or beside the lake.

“Oh,” Neville said, surprised, pleased-sounding, and brought something shiny out of his mouth. A tarnished gold ring.

“That’s disgusting,” Harry said concisely. “This is a bad present.”

Neville rolled his eyes. “It’s meant to be there. It’s baked in for good luck.”

“I definitely would have choked on that,” Harry pointed out.

“You need to chew better,” Neville replied nonsensically. He tried to fit the ring on his forefinger, but it wouldn’t quite go. Harry took a bite of the sweet bread, since it was safe again, biting down on a soft raisin.

“Here,” Neville said, and did a gesture with his hands that Harry didn’t understand. Neville leant forward with a sigh and took Harry’s wrist, sliding it across the table towards him.

“What,” Harry said.

“It’s for you,” Neville said, and slid the ring onto Harry’s thumb. It felt tight, cold. “It’s your present.”

“That’s been in your mouth,” Harry said numbly.

Neville glanced up at him. “I wiped it off,” he said, absently. His face was doing something
complex.

It was a silly joke ring from a loaf of bread that wasn’t even that nice, an accident, it was going to make Harry’s thumb go green. Neville had put it on him, though.

“Neville,” Harry said weakly.

Neville squeezed his wrist and then stood up, still holding it, and then walked around the desk. He had to let go when he cupped Harry’s face in his hands.

“Nev,” Harry said, then swallowed hard, his heart thudding. “Can you-- will you tell me if I’m being stupid about this.”

He’d been working up the courage to kiss Neville for a month. It hadn’t occurred to him that Neville would be the one to--

“You’re not,” Neville said, bending down, and kissed him.

10.

“Do you want to hear something funny?” Neville asked, one Sunday in January.

Harry looked up at him, over the soft slope of Neville’s stomach. His mouth was hot, wet, his lips buzzing. “Now?” he said wryly.

Neville patted him on the head, heavy handed and clumsy, and brushed some of Harry’s hair back from his face, fondly. “I used to be a bit scared of you in school,” he confessed, smiling.

They were in Neville’s bed, on top of the worn duvet and under the window that caught the best of the afternoon sunlight.

Harry rose up further, so he could look properly at Neville’s face, the curve of his jaw. “Scared of me?” he asked.


Harry raised his eyebrows, and took his hand off Neville’s dick. Neville laughed.

“Are you intimidated now?” Harry said, trying to be stern, but it was difficult with Neville looking at him like that, with those blue eyes.

Neville flicked the side of Harry’s ear. “No,” he replied, smiling still, softly. “Not at all.”

11.

Harry had once thought he knew what being lonely felt like. And what he thought it felt like was being shut in a cupboard for two days when all you wanted was someone to talk to. Or the feeling that everyone else apart from you was in on the same secret, knew something you didn’t know, were using code-words right in front of you that you didn’t understand.

When Neville came home in the evening after a long day and sat down next to Harry on the sofa,
hands covered in dirt, when he laughed, on the morning he fell asleep at the breakfast table for the fourth time, Harry’s heart grew in his chest. It grew past the borders of his body and kept growing, until it was huge and uncontainable, the size of their living room, the size of the castle, the mountains.

Harry knew now that he had been lonely before, had been waiting for something even if he hadn’t known it at the time. Looking back, it seemed foolish that he hadn’t recognised it just because it hadn’t felt the way he’d expected it to.

End Notes

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