

flirting with all those other boys right in front of him. Just telling him to *wait until I was ready*. He's probably sick of waiting by now, after me stringing him along for almost a year."

Privately, Harry doubted Neville would ever be sick of waiting for Ginny Weasley. But he didn't deserve that treatment, and he would never say that himself. So Harry would do it for him. "Yeah, you have been a shit to him," he agreed. "And if he's not interested anymore, that's just something you'll have to live with." Ginny looked heartbroken at the prospect. "But dating more random guys isn't going to help that. It's not going to make you any less in love with him. And it's certainly not going to convince him that you're ready to give things a try."

"I know," Ginny agreed plaintively. "I'm done, with all that. After Michael... I don't want a boyfriend just for the sake of having one. Just to try things out. I want a boyfriend that matters, or none at all." She took a shaky breath. "I want Neville," she admitted in a small voice.

"Then when we get back after Christmas, you go and apologise to him, and grovel if you have to, and tell him how you feel. All of how you feel. Or write it in a letter, if telling him is too scary."

Ginny's hand gripped his, knuckles turning white. "I didn't mean for things to get this complicated," she insisted quietly. "I just — it felt so *big*, so much, and I thought for sure it couldn't be that so I flirted with all those other boys to try and prove that I wasn't some silly little girl who falls arse-over-teakettle for the first boy to actually pay attention to me. I thought I'd start feeling for them like I felt for Neville and it might get a little less scary."

Harry pursed his lips, thinking it over. "Gin," he said slowly. "You remember the Yule Ball, when I disappeared for a bit?"

"And came back looking like you'd been ravished?" she teased. He nodded, and her eyes widened. "Is this about your secret boyfriend that the twins and Neville know about but you won't tell me?"

"You can't tell anyone, I mean it," he said seriously. "He could be killed if anyone finds out."

"I won't tell a soul. Not even Charlie." Considering the dragon tamer was her favourite brother, that was a strong promise.

"I've been dating Draco Malfoy since the first task," he admitted, getting the familiar happy butterflies in his belly when he remembered their first kiss, over a year ago now. Ginny gaped.

"Malfoy? But— oh my God, him coming to talk to you on the train makes so much more sense now." Harry nodded.

"We started being friends in my third year. In secret, obviously. His dad's an absolute piece of shit, and he'd kill Draco if he knew we were even *civil*, let alone how important he is to me."

"And you've kept it secret, all this time?"