

“Just giving Rita Skeeter something to really complain about,” he replied vaguely. He glanced back at Luna, and then his gaze caught something that made him pause. Ginny was over at the Ravenclaw table too, but she wasn’t sat with Luna. She was sat between two Ravenclaw boys in Harry’s year, and seemed to be flirting pretty blatantly with one of them. Her hand was on his shoulder as she leaned in close and giggled, and the boy smiled shyly at her. Harry looked at Neville. “Why’s Ginny over at the Ravenclaw table?” he asked hesitantly. Neville looked up, eyes casting over to the redhead, and then he looked away, his smile faltering.

“Oh. She’s got her sights set on Stephen Cornfoot, I expect.”

Harry’s brow furrowed, puzzled. “But... I thought Ginny liked you? After the Yule Ball you guys were all... cozy.”

“She does,” Neville confirmed. Now Harry was even more confused. Neville sighed quietly. “We talked about it, the other week. I really like her, and she really likes me, but... neither of us have ever dated anyone before. And she... Ginny says it scares her, how much she likes me, and she thinks, when it happens, we’ll be pretty serious about it. She says she wants to see what it’s like to date other people first.”

Harry blinked. “So... she likes you, and you like her, but she’s gonna go flirt with Stephen because... she likes you too much?”

“That’s about the sum of it,” Neville agreed with a shrug. “I don’t really mind waiting. When she does agree to go out with me, I don’t want her constantly thinking about what she might be missing out on. I’m not really interested in other girls, but if she wants to see what other boys are like... it’s not like I’ve got a hundred other options waiting for me.” His smile turned self-deprecating, and it made Harry frown.

Ginny’s reasoning made absolutely zero sense to Harry — what was the point in dating people you only sort-of liked if there was someone you knew you really liked waiting right there? Even if you did end up only ever dating them? — But he supposed it wasn’t really any of his business. Neville seemed alright with it, even if he was studiously avoiding looking towards the Ravenclaw table.

“Well. Okay, then. If you, uh, ever need to talk about it...” Harry trailed off, and Neville’s smile became a little more sincere.

“Thanks, Harry.” Neville paused, drinking his tea. “So what are you doing with Luna? I thought you hadn’t figured out yet how Skeeter was getting her information.”

“I haven’t,” Harry replied, though he made a mental note to double down on his efforts to figure out. “And when I do, that’ll be going to my lawyer, not to Luna. No, I’m coming out in the *Quibbler*.”

Neville dropped his teacup. Luckily, it was mostly empty. “You’re what?”

“I’m not saying anything about, y’know,” his eyes flicked to the Slytherin table for the briefest moment, “for obvious reasons. But if Skeeter’s determined to pair me up with every