

“I know, Tonks,” Kingsley assured her; he didn’t seem remotely offended, and somehow that was *worse*, like he didn’t expect her to want him there.

“No, it’s not that,” she said, though he hadn’t even said anything, really. She groaned quietly as she tried to figure out how to articulate herself properly — but the only way to really do that was to just throw her entire heart on the line.

She looked up at Kingsley’s patient, gorgeous face, and suddenly it seemed daft to even *think* about being worried. He had never batted an eyelash at anything else she’d emotionally-vomited at him in their relationship. Why would this be any different?

“Letting you come to the summer home, it’s... even *I* didn’t know about it until last Christmas — Mum didn’t tell me because even after she was disowned from the Black family, it was still a Black family secret. She didn’t consider her own *child* part of the Black family enough to tell me. It’s the most secure place we have in the entire world, precisely because the only people who know how to find it are people who would rather die than give up its location — than betray the Black family like that. Inviting anyone who isn’t blood... it’s practically declaring intent to marry, in the eyes of the rest of my family. It’s a big deal. And I don’t want to put that kind of pressure on you just because my family is ancient and weird and secretive.”

It all blurted out in one rushed mess, but she could see Kingsley taking in every word, thinking it over with that ever-present patience, that eternal steadiness that Tonks loved so much. Her heart pounded furiously in her chest as she waited for some kind of a response. Eventually, he took her hand, bringing it up to his lips. “That kind of commitment doesn’t scare me, Tonks.”

She stilled. “I— really?”

His deep brown eyes met hers, unflinching. “Amelia has promised me her job heading the DMLE, if she makes Minister after the war,” he said, and she blinked, perplexed — what did that have to do with anything? “If I take that job, I’ll no longer be your superior; not in any chain-of-command way that matters.” His lips curved in a tiny, bashful smile. “I had hoped, once it was no longer putting either of our jobs at risk... well, let’s just say that declaring intent to marry is not a problem for me. Not with you.”

“Oh.” Tonks was wide-eyed, turning to face him properly. She felt ridiculous, sat there in her shirt and pants while he was fully dressed, and he’d basically just *proposed*. “But— but I’m a mess,” she blurted. “I’m clumsy and I talk too much and I have too many opinions about muggle music and I can’t even stick to one bloody gender and you’re—” He was Lord Kingsley Shacklebolt, accomplished and proud and capable in every situation he faced; never stuttering, never tripping over his own feet, never hasty or quick-tempered or anything less than incredible; the kind of man who deserved a wife just as capable and calm and able to be an actual *wife*, not like Tonks.

“I’m...?” Kingsley raised an eyebrow expectantly, kissing her hand again. “If the end of that sentence is anything other than ‘completely in love with you’, it’s irrelevant. Your clumsiness is endearing, and I love listening to you talk because I spend far too much in my own head, and yes you might have questionable muggle music taste but my own is equally suspect. And