

He nodded again. "You're now the fourth person at school to know." He didn't count Snape. "Sirius and Remus know, too. Sirius is cousins with his mum, Narcissa. She knows; she's really nice, she's just stuck married to a Death Eater."

"That's awful," Ginny murmured sadly.

"The point is," Harry continued, "I'm in love with Draco. Completely besotted, absolutely *embarrassingly* in love with him. And yeah, it terrifies me," he said freely. "I've never kissed anyone but him, and if I have my way, I never will. But I don't think I'm missing out. I can't talk for what it's like to do anything with anyone else. And I'm not saying you should only date people you're in love with, or whatever. But knowing how amazing it feels, just being with him... I don't understand why you're denying yourself that." He gave a rueful smile. "We could both be killed if the wrong person finds out about us. Hell, I might get killed by Voldemort before I graduate. So maybe the fear of losing him is greater than the fear of loving him. But, look at it this way — you're gonna feel the way you do about Neville whether you're dating him or not. Isn't it better to just... accept it, and be happy?"

The redhead was silent for a long time, leaning gently against Harry's shoulder, her fingers twisting in the edge of the blanket on the sofa. "I think I've fucked it all up, Harry," she said in a heartbroken whisper.

"I don't know about that," Harry mused. "Nev's a good bloke. And he cares a lot about you. Hell, the fact that he didn't even blink when you dated Michael proves that. Maybe the two of you need a bit of time to straighten out some hurt feelings, but I don't think it's ruined. It might be, if you keep acting like he's always going to be there, though. Like he's your back-up choice, or your afterthought."

She looked horrified. "I don't think that!"

"Well it looks like it, sometimes," Harry said bluntly. She needed to know how much she'd hurt Neville. Even if it hurt her in the process. "It looks like you're gonna go off and have your fun and when you're bored of all the other boys you'll come back and settle for Neville."

Ginny looked like she was going to be sick at the very idea of it. Harry squeezed her gently, kissing her head. "If you love him, tell him. It'll eat you up inside if you don't." He knew that from experience. "I'm gonna leave you to think for a bit — we've been up here long enough, and if your mum figures it out she'll either castrate me or start planning the wedding," he said with a grimace. "But I'm always around if you need to talk, yeah? And if not me, you've got four other brothers in this house who are probably less useless with relationship advice and have *way* more experience."

"You're not useless, Harry," Ginny insisted. "I— I think I needed to hear all that. Even the hard bits. Go on, I'll be fine. Might just have a cry for a bit," she said, wiping at her eyes. Then she managed a grin that was a shadow of its usual cheeky self. "But later you're gonna tell me all the juicy gossip about Draco Malfoy, yeah? And whatever you didn't want to tell me at St Mungo's."