

Neville gave him a wry look. “Not today, no.”

They were interrupted by Rosmerta, delivering a butterbeer for Neville, and the pair of them ordered lunch. Harry could feel eyes on them, but ignored them all; it wouldn’t be the first time people had thought he was dating Neville.

When they were alone again, Harry cleared his throat. “So, uh... neither of you asked each other, or...?” He wondered, for a brief horrified moment, if Ginny was out there in the village on a date with some *other* boy. If she was... Harry would be having *words* with her.

“She asked me,” Neville confirmed. Harry blinked — now he was even more confused.

“But, then...”

Neville sipped at his drink, and sighed. “Valentine’s Day is... so much pressure. It’s this big cliché of romance and grand gestures and all that, and I just... she had her time for herself, when she was dating Michael and everything. After that, after how that felt... I needed a bit of time for myself. I think we both need a bit of space to be alone for a bit, to be honest.”

“That’s understandable,” Harry agreed softly. He wondered if Neville had admitted — either to Ginny or even to himself — how much watching her with Michael had hurt him.

“I’m not saying no forever,” Neville assured. “I want to be with Ginny. But... I didn’t think Valentine’s Day was the easiest place to start from.”

As if to accentuate his point, a girl across the room stood from the table, screamed a Stinging hex at her date, and stormed out. The boy stared after her, a huge welt forming across his cheek. Harry and Neville shared a look, wincing.

“No, I get it,” Harry said, turning away from the drama. “You’re sticking up for yourself.” He gave the boy a small grin. “I’m proud of you, mate.”

Neville blushed, ducking his head, and was saved having to respond by the arrival of their lunch.

Ginny needed to see that Neville wasn’t just waiting around for her to be ready for him. He had to be ready, too. And she deserved to be the one waiting, for a change.

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After lunch with Neville, Harry headed back up to the castle — he had tried to wander the village a bit more, but Neville had wanted to go to Dogweed and Deathcap, and Harry was not willing to sacrifice the two hours of his day that would inevitably take. And since being alone just made more people stare and giggle at him, he decided to take his leave.

He had his own plans to take care of, after all.

It was nearly three by the time he made it back to Gryffindor Tower, which was mostly full of younger year students; some studying, some just hanging out, and a few brave souls clearly trying to get what romance they could from within the confines of the castle. Seeing the pair