

"Stumbling Out of the Floo" Stumbling Out of the Floo

Stumbling Out of the Floo

By Abraxan

This was definitely the summer from hell. Not that every other summer Harry could remember hadn't been hellish, but this time . . . this time . . .

Sirius was dead. He'd fallen through that Veil and just . . . *disappeared!* Harry's friends had tried to convince him that he shouldn't blame himself, that Sirius had died the way he would've wanted to, but Harry was convinced that it was his own stupidity that put Sirius in danger in the first place. And then there was the prophecy. His thoughts hadn't strayed from the darkest possible places in weeks.

A tap on his window attracted Harry's attention. Hedwig was back, so he opened the window wider to let her in. She was the only company he'd had all summer so far. He couldn't understand how Hedwig knew when she had to go somewhere else to pick up mail for him, but she frequently brought him letters from Remus, Hermione and the Weasleys. Their letters weren't replies to his own, because he hadn't written anyone in ages.

"What do you have there, girl?" he said as she held her leg out expectantly. He recognized Hermione's handwriting immediately. Harry sighed. He didn't want to write to Hermione, or even to hear her well-meaning platitudes and useless advice. He just wanted to be left alone.

He gave Hedwig an owl treat and scratched her head affectionately, then sighed and sat down to see what his best friend was going to nag him about this time.

Dear Harry,

I know you haven't written to anyone, so you're probably still horribly depressed. You know how sorry all of us are about Sirius. What happened to him was awful, and so unfair, and I don't blame you for withdrawing from everyone for a while. You need to know that we miss him too, not like you do, of course, but still, we miss him. And we miss you, Harry, more than you know. We're worried about you. If you want to talk, you know both Ron and I are here for you. We're your best friends. Please let us help you.

I have an idea that may cheer you up! For your birthday tomorrow (did you remember?), Professor Dumbledore has agreed to let you Floo from Mrs. Figg's to the Weasleys'. My dad will have our car there and we will take you and Ron and Ginny to an amusement park to celebrate your birthday! Doesn't that sound like fun? Have you ever been to one? Ron and Ginny haven't. Since her birthday's just a couple of weeks away, I thought this day out could be my present to both of you. Ginny's so excited about it! I hope you will be too!

The park has wonderful rides and lots of food my parents won't normally let me eat. (They are dentists, after all!) Since it's your and Ginny's birthdays, we'll eat anything and everything that appeals to us!

If you aren't at the Weasleys' by 8 AM, Ron and I will come to the Dursleys' and drag you out! Ginny's been itching to Bat-Bogey someone for quite a while, so she may come to escort you to the Weasleys' too! Don't say you weren't warned!

See you tomorrow! This is going to be such fun!

Hermione

An amusement park? Harry's mouth quirked just a tiny bit. The Dursleys took Diddydumdum and a couple of his friends to the nearest amusement park every year during the summer. It was a family tradition. Harry, of course, was always left locked in his room while they were gone.

He really didn't feel like being cheerful or having fun, but if it was for Ginny's birthday as well, he should probably go. She'd been a good friend to him, writing him long, funny letters every few days all summer despite his not responding. Everyone else sent letters filled with sympathy, worry about how he was and unasked for advice. Ginny's letters were the only bright spot in his days.

A sudden realization came to Harry as he thought about Ginny. *I'm an idiot! She's the only person I know who's been possessed by Voldemort other than me. Perhaps she could give me some insight into how to get past the experience. She doesn't sit around brooding all the time like I do. She's feisty and funny and brilliant and beautiful . . .*

He sat up straighter, startled. *Whoa, where did that come from? She's Ron's sister! He'd kill me for looking at her, much less thinking she's beautiful!* He sighed, thinking of that tantalizing flowery scent that followed her wherever she went. Not long before Sirius died, Harry had noticed that scent gave him the same swooping feeling in his stomach that he got when flying straight up or doing a steep dive. It also gave him odd feelings in the middle of his chest that he truly didn't understand, like a restless beast of some kind. He hadn't thought about that scent or how he reacted to it since Sirius had died, yet that scent seemed to be tickling his nostrils now and she wasn't even here! The beast in his chest rumbled, reminding Harry of an extremely large cat purring. He lifted Hermione's letter to his nose and sniffed it. No, of course sensible Hermione didn't use

scented parchment. He got up and walked to his open window. The scent wasn't coming through the window either. He smiled a bit. *Thinking about Ginny must have made me remember that scent. Funny that it seems I can smell it.*

He sat down at his desk, dipped his quill in his ink bottle and wrote on the back of Hermione's letter.

Hi Hermione,

Thank you for the invitation to the amusement park. No, I've never been to one. It sounds like fun. It will be a nice way to celebrate Ginny's birthday – and mine, as well. Thank you for thinking of me. I'll see you tomorrow at the Weasleys'.

Harry

HPHPHPHPHP

At 8 AM sharp, Harry stepped into Mrs. Figg's Floo and cried, "The Burrow!" He closed his eyes as fireplaces spun by at a dizzying rate. A moment later, he stumbled out of the Weasleys' fireplace and would've fallen to his knees on the hearth if he hadn't found his momentum stopped by a petite redhead whose lips somehow got in the way of his. Their kiss was awkward and brief and left both of them blushing.

Harry put his hands on Ginny's arms to steady both of them as he took a step back. He could still feel her lips on his. A silly grin crossed his face when he realized he didn't want to forget that feeling.

Hermione's voice drifted downstairs. "Was that the Floo? Is Harry here?"

Ginny's mouth opened and closed several times before she was able to blurt out, "Erm . . . yeah."

Harry dropped his hands from Ginny's arms . . . her *bare* arms. In the blink of an eye, he realized she was wearing a white top that had thin straps and no sleeves and left her shoulders and the top of her chest and back bare too. He was surprised to see she had a smattering of freckles on her chest as well. He wanted to lean forward and see if she had them on her back as well. He barely caught himself before he acted on that though. Harry gave himself a mental slap. Of *course* she had freckles there, and probably on her back as well! She was a Weasley, after all! Ron had freckles just about everywhere . . . Harry held in a gasp. He didn't want to think about *that* when he was looking at Ginny! So she had freckles on her shoulders and chest, and probably her back too. Fine.

While trying to avoid looking at her freckled shoulders, his eyes were suddenly caught by the three tiny yellow roses embroidered in a line down the centre of her blouse, a line that fell just in the valley between her breasts. Harry dragged his eyes away from her chest, certain his ears were a lovely red worthy of any Weasley right now.

Moving his eyes away from those tiny roses and their location made him notice her shorts were cut off blue jeans, and she had sandals on. Her legs were freckled too. He liked that, he liked that a lot. Her toenails were painted a very cheerful purple. Suddenly he liked purple very much.

All of these thoughts flew through his head in the blink of an eye. A moment later, Harry realized he should say something instead of just staring at Ginny and blushing. But what should he say? His mouth gaped a few times before he could get his voice started.

"Erm . . . hi! Sorry about crashing into you." He wondered for a moment if his face was as red as hers. His cheeks and ears felt as if they were on fire!

"I . . . I . . . uh . . ." Ginny, normally never at a loss for words, seemed to be stuck somehow. She shook her head and cleared her throat, then finally smiled at him, although she was still blushing. "Happy birthday, Harry! I didn't realize you still stumble out of the Floo." She finally tore her eyes from his and cast a cleaning charm on him, making the soot disappear.

"Thanks," he said, admiring her handiwork. "I'm rubbish at the household charms." He couldn't stop grinning. He could still feel the soft warmth of her lips on his. And would he ever stop blushing?

Hermione and Ron came in just then. "You're here!" Hermione said, her arms open in welcome. "Happy birthday, Harry!" She wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

"Yeah, happy birthday, mate," Ron said, clapping Harry on his back as Hermione released him from her hug.

"Why are you both so red?" Hermione said, studying Harry and Ginny each far too closely for their comfort.

"I fell over when I came out of the Floo. I'm embarrassed, and Ginny's trying to be polite and not laugh at me," Harry said, glancing at Ginny and hoping she'd go along with his story.

Ginny burst out laughing right on cue. "That's it exactly," she said when she caught her breath.

He shook his head and grinned at her, her laughter triggering his. "Thanks a lot."

Ginny was laughing uncontrollably now. She managed to say, "No problem!" between the peals of laughter.

Harry stopped laughing but stood smiling at her as she continued to laugh. His smile faded as he wondered if their kiss was *funny* to her. He'd hoped she might think it was sweet, even if it had been an accident, but perhaps she didn't. Was she taking the mickey? He thought she was a better friend than that, but she was the twins' sister and very much like them in many ways. They would take the mickey out of someone after something like that happened, so she very well might do the same. He sighed and turned to Ron and Hermione again as Ginny's laughter faded

away.

Hermione was studying his clothes as she stepped back from him. He was wearing an old t-shirt of Dudley's that was so worn, its burgundy had faded almost to pink. It hung off him loosely, his exposed collarbones showing how thin he was. His shorts were rumpled from being cinched up with a belt Harry had punched lots of holes in to make it fit him, and they were so big, he and Ron both could have squeezed into one of the legs. His trainers were held together by duct tape. He blushed under Hermione's scrutiny. These were the best casual clothes he had.

"I happen to know that Remus and Tonks are taking you shopping for your birthday," Hermione said, still appraising him, "but we need to do something about what you're wearing today, given where we're going. These clothes may be dangerous on the rides because they're so loose, and your trainers . . ." Her voice faded as she gazed at Harry's oversized shoes. "Those don't really fit you either, do they?"

Harry was glad to hear he'd have some new clothes soon, but he was also embarrassed by his friend's sudden close attention to what he was wearing. He dropped his eyes. "No."

Hermione stepped closer to him and bent her head, trying to see his face beyond his fringe. When he finally glanced up at her, she said, "Would you mind if I Transfigured your clothes and shoes to fit you better?"

Having clothes and shoes that fit him would be a huge improvement. Harry blew out a breath and straightened up, determined to show his best friend he appreciated her thoughtfulness. "That would be great, thanks."

Hermione took out her wand and studied him a moment longer, then waved her wand in a complicated pattern. Harry jumped as his clothes began to shrink and tighten. He suddenly realized his belt was tightening too. He grunted in pain and tried to unbuckle it.

"What's wrong?" Hermione said, her smile of satisfaction fading when she saw Harry struggling with something hidden by his still overly-large t-shirt.

"His belt's strangling him!" Ginny said. She reached for his belt. "Let me try, Harry. My hands should be small enough to get it loose."

Harry stepped back hastily, feeling even more embarrassed than he had already. "Erm, Ginny, I'd, um, could you . . ."

"Get your hands off the poor bloke, Ginny!" Ron said, half laughing and half grumbling. "I'll fix it." He pointed his wand at Harry's belt and it opened.

Harry made an odd squawking sound as his shorts fell to the floor. His boxers would've followed them if not for quick action on Harry's part. He was so embarrassed, he thought that even his bum must be red by now and he'd really prefer Ginny and Hermione didn't see that! "Girls, turn around, please?"

Ginny was laughing so hard she could barely stand up. Hermione looked mortified, but a grin was tickling her lips too. Finally, she couldn't hold it in.

"Oh dear," Hermione managed to say between giggles. "I didn't shrink your boxers. Hold on."

Harry glared at her in annoyance. "I'll do it. Just turn around, please?" He turned and scowled at Ginny. "Really. Please?"

The girls sighed dramatically. "You're no fun," Ginny said, and flounced a bit as she turned around. Hermione was still giggling.

"Don't look at me, mate," Ron said, holding his hands up in surrender. "I'm not as good at Transfiguration as you and Hermione are."

"Fine." Harry pointed his wand at his boxers and muttered the same spell Hermione had used, one he'd never tried before. He groaned and fell to his knees as the boxers shrank quite a bit too much. "*Finite Incantatum!*" His voice was a high unnatural squeak.

Hermione turned around quickly. "What happened?"

Ron's face was white. His voice came out in a high squeak too. "They shrank too much."

"What's wrong with your voice, Ron?" Ginny said, glaring at him. "Nothing happened to you!"

"Any bloke who saw that would react the same way," Ron replied, nodding his head to emphasize his point.

"Show me the wand movement you used, Harry," Hermione said patiently.

Harry was busy holding his loosened boxers up and trying to get his breath back after being in horrific pain even if only for a moment. He finally managed to untangle his wand hand from the voluminous boxers and stand up, then showed Hermione what he'd done.

"Well, of course it didn't work properly! You have to flick the wand at the beginning just a bit, like this." She demonstrated, then watched as Harry copied her movement. "That's it. Now try again." She crossed her arms and stood there watching him.

"Hermione!" Harry said, huffing impatiently. "Turn around!"

Hermione gave him an exasperated look, then glanced at Ginny, causing both of them to giggle as they turned away from Harry.

"Finally," Harry muttered, then cast the spell correctly. He pulled his shorts up and adjusted his belt so it would no longer strangle his middle, then sighed with satisfaction. "That's much better. Thanks, Hermione."

“Try doing your trainers yourself so you can practice the charm,” she advised.

Moments later, the rolled-up socks had been removed from the toes of Harry’s trainers and the spell had been cast. Now his trainers not only fit him well, but they were clean and repaired, the duct tape banished. Harry grinned. He’d never owned new trainers before, but these at least *looked* like new. It was a heady experience, being as well-dressed as his friends.

“Full marks, Harry! I’m sorry the resizing didn’t go perfectly and that you were embarrassed,” Hermione said, then giggled again. “I truly am sorry . . . but thanks for the laugh!”

As Harry made a face at her for her cheek, Ginny added, “And the show!” and laughed out loud again. Harry just sighed. He couldn’t win with these two sometimes!

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The four friends walked out to the Grangers’ car, a large luxury saloon that Harry knew would impress Uncle Vernon if he saw it. Hermione got in the front with her parents while Ginny sat in the middle of the back seat between the boys. Harry felt his face heat up as his leg brushed hers. He turned and stared out of the window, hoping no one had noticed.

The ride to the park was both uncomfortable and exciting for Harry, who had never been to this part of the country and enjoyed the scenery. He was also enjoying being so close to Ginny, although he was doing his best to keep his leg from brushing hers, which made him pretty tense as he scrunched his body as close to the door as possible to give her more room. She didn’t seem to mind sitting near him, though, because she kept her foot close to his feet, rather than on the hump in the middle of the floor. *She* was the one doing the leg-brushing, Harry realized with a start. And she was *enjoying* it, from the gleam he could see in her eye when he glanced at her! He was annoyed and impressed at the same time.

The next time he glanced at her, she caught his eye, gave him a smirk and bumped his leg with hers. Harry could feel the blush burning his cheeks and ears, but he smirked right back and bumped her knee with his, which made her giggle.

“What?” Ron said when he heard her giggle. “Did I miss something?”

“Harry has fuzzy legs,” Ginny said. “It tickles!”

Ron leaned around his sister and glared at Harry. “Are you being inappropriate with my sister?”

“Um . . .” Harry began, truly clueless about what he should say.

“No, he’s being a perfect gentleman,” Ginny declared. “When we went around that corner, my leg bumped his and it tickled, that’s all. Leave Harry alone, you big git!”

Ron looked affronted. “I was just—”

“Being a busybody,” Ginny finished for him. “Harry and I are big enough to take care of ourselves, aren’t we, Harry?” she said as she turned to Harry with a look in her eye that dared him to argue with her.

“Uh, yeah! We’re practically grown up.”

“You’re nearly 16, she’s nearly 15,” Ron grumbled. “That’s not nearly grown up.”

Harry had to laugh at that. Ron had groused in a recent letter to Harry that his mum shouldn’t treat him like a kid because he was nearly an adult. “We may not be as close to scraping the ceiling with our heads as you are, but we’re not little kids anymore either.”

Ginny turned to Harry with a grin. “Well said!”

“Ron, leave them alone,” Hermione said from the front seat. “How much trouble can they get into sitting in the back seat with you?”

Ron mumbled something nobody could understand and leaned against his door with a sulky expression. When Harry glanced over at his best mate a moment later though, he noticed Ron was watching Hermione with a strange smile. She was talking animatedly with her parents, her ponytail swinging as she turned from one to the other. Harry watched Ron for a moment, intrigued by the look on his face. *Has Ron finally realized that he fancies her? Wonder if he’ll ever do anything about it?*

Ginny drew Harry’s attention away from Ron when she laced her fingers together and stretched her arms out in front of her, making those embroidered roses disappear completely in a fold in her blouse, down in that valley he didn’t mean to be watching. When he tore his eyes away from forbidden territory again, he saw Ginny giving him a cheeky smile, which he managed to return with a raised eyebrow and a smirk of his own. Apparently she had some mischief in mind that involved him. Despite the burning of his ears (again!), he was looking forward to learning what she was up to.

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Harry, Ginny and Ron all gawked like little children when the amusement park came into view. Roller coasters went up to ridiculous heights at even more ridiculous angles and then careened down at breath-taking speed. Colourful lights were everywhere. Everything was painted in bright, cheerful, sometimes garish colours. There was simply too much to look at! Harry felt overwhelmed by the colour, action and noise before it all

clicked into place in his mind and he breathed, "Brilliant!"

"Come on, kids," Mr. Granger said, taking his wife's hand and leading the way. He paid the admission for everyone and handed them colourful paper bracelets, then gave each of them some Muggle money, as well. "Put the bracelets on," he said, putting one on his wife's wrist to show the kids how they fastened. "The bracelets are your admission to all the rides and shows for the whole day. The money's for food and souvenirs. Here are maps so you don't get lost. Hermione knows her way around the park fairly well, but if you decide to go off on your own," here he looked at Ron and Harry, "make sure you have a map in your pocket and pay attention to the landmarks around you. They're pictured on the map so it's easy to find your way." Seeing nods all around, he looked at his watch. "Let's meet for tea around six, okay? Let's say . . . how about that restaurant that's near the merry-go-round? That should be easy for all of you to find. Is that okay?"

"That's fine, Dad, thanks!" Hermione said, beaming at her father.

"Thanks, Mr. Granger," Harry said. "This is the best birthday I've ever had!"

"Me too," Ginny agreed.

"Glad we could do this for you," Mr. Granger said with a smile. "Don't eat anything heavy or greasy before you go on the big rides, or you'll regret it. Otherwise, have a great time!"

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Harry, Ginny and Ron were eating the first candy floss they'd ever had. Ron, of course, took a huge bite, nearly burying his face in the soft, sticky treat and wound up with candy floss on his nose and chin. Harry and Ginny laughed while Hermione daintily removed it for him. Ron stared at the sweet in her fingers for a long moment, then looked up at her face. His eyes softened and a small smile tickled his lips for a moment before he reached out and gently took hold of her wrist, watching her face to see if she minded. When she just gave him a curious look, he pulled her hand toward his mouth and very deliberately ate the sweet off her fingers. Hermione gasped when he did it, then seemed to melt when he smiled at her again after he finished.

Harry couldn't resist teasing his best mate. "Tell me, Ron, did Hermione's fingers make it taste even better?"

Ron's eyes never left Hermione's. "Yeah. Yeah, they did." He had a funny half-smile on his face, and he hadn't let go of her hand yet. Hermione stood there with her mouth hanging open, uncharacteristically speechless.

Harry looked at Ginny and saw her give an evil grin. She was going to tease them, he was sure of it. Ron was so focused on Hermione, he wasn't paying any attention to Harry or Ginny.

When he saw Ron lace his fingers with Hermione's, Harry decided to give them a break. He took Ginny's hand in his and started leading her away from them. "Dodgems or roller coaster?"

She glanced down at their joined hands and blushed before answering. "Erm . . . I don't know what they are. Which one do you prefer?"

"I've never been on either one, so I want to try them both. The Dodgems are over there, and the roller coaster is at the far end of that queue." He pointed toward the queue and laughed when he saw her jaw drop as her eyes followed the queue to the ride, which went straight up and dropped almost straight down very near the beginning.

"That!" she said breathlessly, then turned and grinned at him. She stood on tiptoe and whispered in his ear, "It looks like a Wronsky Feint!"

"Yeah, it does," he said, still holding her hand. He shivered a bit. Her breath had tickled his ear again. He realized he wouldn't mind that happening a lot more often. He saw her glance back at Ron and Hermione. He looked back at them, then grinned at her. "Looks like they won't miss us for a while. We'll catch up with them at tea, if not before."

Ginny peeped at their joined hands again, then beamed up at Harry. "Yeah, let's go."

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The roller coaster was great fun, as were the Dodgems, but to Harry, the Scrambler was the best so far. It had four cars at the end of each arm that spun around so fast, the person on the inside slid into the one on the outside again and again. After observing this phenomenon while they waited in the queue, Harry made sure he let Ginny get in first so he had the outside seat. He reasoned that it might hurt her if he slid into her much smaller body, and he didn't think it would be that hard on him if she slid into him.

Once the safety bar closed in front of them, they didn't have to wait long for the ride to start moving. Ginny held the bar tightly for a while, but as the speed of the ride increased, she ended up sliding across the seat and slamming into Harry.

"Sorry!" she said, her voice filled with laughter.

"No worries," Harry replied, grinning at her. He would never have thought having someone else crashing into him would be fun, but it was! At least, it was when it was Ginny.

After the Scrambler, they walked around looking for the next ride they wanted to try. There was one that spun around and then spun the other

direction after it lifted up into the air on the end of a long arm. Ginny grabbed Harry's hand and led him to the queue for one with a big grin on her face.

He smiled down at her as they took their place in the queue. "Are you having fun?"

"Yes, these rides are brilliant!" She laughed and looked up as the ride rose above them on a long metal arm covered in colourful flashing lights. "I had no idea . . ." She looked around, then stood on tiptoes and murmured in his ear, "I had no idea Muggles were so inventive."

Harry was still absorbing the lovely tingling sensation he'd felt from her breath on his ear and just grinned at her in reply. She was still holding his hand too. Was this a date? His date with Cho really hadn't impressed him at all. He'd been nervous most of the time, then confused, and then was just glad it was over and hoped never to go through such an experience again! And here was Ginny, so bright and fun and . . . Ron's little sister. She was *Ron's little sister* and here Harry was, wondering if he was starting to fancy her. She was Ron's LITTLE SISTER!

Just then, Ginny glanced up at him with laughter in her eyes and tugged on his hand to move them along the queue. Harry realized the battle was lost before he'd noticed it had begun. He *already* fancied her. Ron would kill him! Well, maybe not, since Ron obviously fancied Hermione and Harry could play the brother card against Ron if he tried to do anything about him and Ginny. Him and Ginny. Harry liked the sound of that.

He studied the top of Ginny's head, noticing how the bright strands caught the sunlight, turning the fiery red into a shimmering red and gold. Even the top of her head was pretty! How did she manage that? He smiled, amused at the wanderings of his mind.

Finally, it was their turn to get on the ride. Harry took the outside seat again and grinned at Ginny, who was bouncing in her place, eager for the ride to start. They both whooped when the ride started by swiftly lifting them high in the air while slowly starting to spin.

With the ride spinning first one way, then the other, Ginny was not only sliding into Harry, but Harry was sliding into her. The third time he slid into her, he wrapped his arm around her shoulder and held on. "Maybe this will keep us from crashing into each other so much," he said just as they both slid toward his side. "Oof! Or not!" He started to take his arm away from Ginny, but when he did, she went back to sliding all over the place.

"I think it's better when you hold on to me!" she cried when she slid into him again.

"Okay," he said, then wrapped his arm securely around her again. They managed to stay in place much better after that, their squeals of joy mingling with those of the other riders.

When they got off the ride, they were both dizzy and kept bumping into each other, which caused a lot of laughter between them. Harry finally put his arm around Ginny so they at least stopped running into each other.

"This is better, yeah?" he said, smiling down at her.

"Yeah! At least now we're wobbling in the same direction! That was BRILLIANT! And I'm so dizzy!"

"Let's sit down," Harry said as they neared an ice cream stand with picnic tables in the shade behind it. "Do you want some ice cream?"

"That ice lolly looks good," Ginny said.

Soon they were both enjoying the frozen treats, trying to lick them fast enough to keep up with the melting. They laughed and talked about nothing in particular. Harry couldn't remember enjoying himself more. He hoped Ginny was having as much fun with him as he was with her.

"There you are!" Hermione said as she and Ron joined them at the table. "Those look good," she added, nodding at the ice lollies Harry and Ginny were enjoying.

"You want one?" Ron offered, getting up again.

"Yeah, like Ginny's. Thanks!" Hermione beamed at him as he left. She turned to Ginny. "Are you having fun?"

"It's wonderful! Harry and I have ridden so many things, and every one of them was brilliant!"

Harry pointed his ice lolly at Ginny and raised an eyebrow, as well. "You didn't think all of them were brilliant. There were two you said were pathetic!"

Hermione grinned at Harry. "Which ones? Those may be the ones I prefer. Ron's been taking me on rides that scare me to death!"

Harry frowned. "Then why don't you tell him you don't want to ride them?"

Hermione's face grew as red as a Weasley's, then she laughed, leaned across the table and murmured. "It's too much fun to hold on to him when I'm terrified!"

Harry and Ginny exchanged a shy glance, but Hermione caught them.

"You've been doing the same thing, haven't you?" she said with a note of triumph in her voice. "Have you finally admitted you fancy each other?"

Harry and Ginny both sat back, startled, and said "What?" at the same time. When they did that, they looked at each other and laughed despite

their blushes.

Hermione clapped her hands. "I knew it! I was sure you just needed a nudge. I'm so happy for you!"

Harry didn't know what to say. He and Ginny had been having fun together, yeah, and they'd held hands while walking and had their arms around each other on rides, but those were necessities! They'd have lost each other in the crowds if they hadn't held hands, and the rides would have thrown them around much more if they hadn't held on to each other. Right?

Harry suddenly wondered why he was trying to convince himself there was nothing between him and Ginny. Oh yeah, because Ginny hadn't said a word in response to Hermione. He stifled a sigh.

"We, um," Ginny began.

"Hi, mate," Harry said quickly as his friend returned to the table with ice lollies in hand. "Long queue, eh?"

"Not too bad. It's so hot today, these are melting fast. Here you go," he told Hermione as he handed her one of the lollies. Once Ron was settled, he looked at Harry, then at Ginny, then at Hermione. He looked at each of them again, then frowned and said, "What's going on?"

"Nothing," Harry said quickly.

"Not nothing," Hermione said, a smile tickling her lips. "They—"

"We've had a wonderful time today," Ginny told her brother, interrupting Hermione. "How about you?"

"Yeah, it's great, isn't it? Which rides have you been on?"

The situation defused at least for the moment, Harry, Ginny and Ron exchanged information about rides. Meanwhile, Hermione sat back and ate her ice lolly while studying Harry and Ginny more closely than was comfortable for Harry, at least.

"What are you going to go on next?" Ron said, looking at Harry and Ginny.

"That last ride you mentioned sounds like fun. A boat ride in the dark with things jumping out at you? And then it slides down a huge drop into water? That sounds like just the thing to do on a hot day," Ginny said.

"The first part of the ride was pretty pathetic, if you ask me," Ron said, "but the last bit was fun!"

Hermione sighed. "The first part is lovely, Ginny. Don't listen to him."

"Sounds as if it had something for both of you," Harry said, smiling at Hermione.

"Yeah." Her smile told Harry far more than her reply did.

The couples soon parted, each setting off to try the rides the others had already ridden. Harry and Ginny soon found themselves in a small boat built for two gliding into a dark tunnel.

"This is nice," Ginny said, leaning against Harry a bit as she relaxed.

"Yeah." Harry didn't mind her leaning on him at all. As soon as she had, the beast in his chest started purring again and he found himself filled with irrational hope. In fact . . . *Am I a Gryffindor or not?* He gathered his courage and said, "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Erm . . . would you, erm, would you consider this a . . . a date?"

Ginny sat up and turned toward him, although they couldn't see each other very well in the dark. "Why do you ask that?"

"Well, we've been holding hands and so on, and . . . I really like it. I like you, Ginny. I think I fancy you, although when Ron finds out, he'll kill me."

"No, he won't. I won't let him." He could hear the happiness in her voice. "And yes, I would like to consider this a date, if you will too."

"I'd like that. I'd like this to be the first of many, actually." He put his arm around her shoulder and pulled her close.

"Mmm, me too," Ginny said, then surprised Harry by kissing him. This wasn't just an accidental bump of the lips like the first one. She had deliberately pulled his head down to hers, put her lips on his and she was *moving* them somehow. Harry couldn't remember his own name anymore, and didn't really care.

The boat moved into a lighted area still inside the tunnel and the sound of people chuckling behind them startled Harry. When they broke off the kiss, Harry knew he had a daft grin on his face, but he didn't care. "That was lovely. Please may I have another?"

"Since you asked so nicely," Ginny said, then wrapped her arms around his neck. As the boat moved into a dark area again, Harry lowered his lips to hers as if he'd done this all his life. Suddenly he hoped he'd live a hundred years or more so he could kiss Ginny for a long, long time.

He had both arms around her now and his lips were moving right along with hers, planting tiny kisses on the corner of her mouth, on the end of her

nose, and then tasting her soft lips again. He was lost in the sensation of her lips on his, his mind agog with delicious yet undefined feelings when they suddenly came out into the sunlight and their boat began to slide down the steep incline that led to the water. They pulled away from each other and threw their arms in the air as they'd done on the roller coaster, whooping joyfully all the way down until they got splashed at the bottom.

As their boat cruised to the spot where they would get out, Harry looked at Ginny, filled with wonder that this beautiful girl had just kissed him and then kissed him again!

Harry climbed out of the boat and turned to help Ginny. He felt stunned, somewhat dizzy, breathless . . . but not from the ride down the slide. "Did that really happen?"

"I was just thinking the same thing," Ginny said softly. She took his hand and let him help her out of the boat, then bumped her hip into his none too gently. "I think we should queue up for this ride again." Her eyes glittered with mischief. Harry was dumbfounded to realize she was *flirting* with him!

When he could manage to breathe again, he told her, "I love the way you think." What else could he say?

As they waited to ride the flume again, Ginny pulled Harry's arms around her and leaned her back against his chest, running her hands gently up and down his arms as if trying to memorize his muscles. He rested his cheek on her bright hair and marvelled at how his life had changed in just one day at an amusement park. And all because he'd stumbled out of the floo.

The End

Please review!!