

Faking It

by themadmermaid

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Chapter 1

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A/N: Thanks once again to sometimeselkie for beta-ing this.

Ginny was walking alone toward the Great Hall, her mind on nothing in particular, when her wrist was grabbed from behind. She nearly whirled around and punched whoever was doing the grabbing. Six older brothers had taught her that most of the time it was better to hit first and then apologize later, if need be. As it was, she turned with her hackles up and her hand twitching near her wand and was shocked to find Draco Malfoy behind her.

He had an expression on his face like a person with a mouthful of something nasty they were too polite to spit out. "Weasley," he managed to grind out from between his clenched teeth. This was definitely out of the ordinary, but Ginny wasn't inclined to play and games right now--unless they were on her own terms.

"Weasley," she said airily. "You know, there's so many of us that I can't be sure that you mean me, Ginevra Molly Weasley, personally, so I'll just be going, shall I?" She then made a production of turning and walking away.

She made it only three steps before his voice stopped her. "Ginny," he said this time, no less grudgingly. A wicked smile crossed her face before she wiped her expression clean and turned around.

"Why, Draco, you do mean me!" she simpered. "I'm sure your mum is extremely proud of the gracious manners she taught you." Draco's face had changed from mild disgust to the countenance of a person who was on the verge of being sick.

She'd better tone it down if she wanted to know what he was after, or she'd send him running to the lavatory. Dropping the act, she said, "Malfoy, get to the point. What do you want?"

Draco looked wildly around the empty corridor. "Not here. Meet me in the library," he said.

Ginny rolled her eyes. "You want me to miss dinner for some secret rendezvous with you in the library?" Disbelief filled her voice and a spasm of pain crossed Draco's face.

Closing his eyes, he spoke one word. "Please."

Now she was really intrigued. "Alright, I'll meet you there in five minutes."

Ginny leaned against the end of a stack at the back of the library, trying not to snicker at Draco. He was holding a book as if he was reading it in an apparent attempt to look as if he wasn't talking to her. But he was talking, spilling his guts to her in a clipped whisper as soon as she'd sauntered down the aisle, purposefully late due to taking the longest route possible.

"Can't you just pay this bet off?" she asked, pushing off the stack to stand and stretch. She could tell that her nonchalance was driving Draco crazy.

"I told you, no," he said, forgetting to whisper in his agitation. "This is the only way."

Ginny crossed her arms and got down to business. "So far, Draco, I don't see what the hell I'd get out of this. Surely you don't think I'm going to do you a favor out of the goodness of my heart?" Her arms uncrossed and went to her hips as she glared at him, but he looked away, saying nothing.

"Oh wait," she said sarcastically, waving her hand as if a thought had just occurred to her. "I guess you want me to help you in exchange for all the helpful things you've ever done for me." Her hand dropped. "Which would number exactly zero. Let's not even get into the things you've done that were shite. Have a nice life, Draco Malfoy," she said and turned to go.

Shoving the book haphazardly back on the shelf, he hurried after her. "Please," he said again.

She didn't even turn around. "That was novel the first time, but it just bores me now."

"Ginny, please," he begged, and for the first time she thought she heard some real emotion in his tone. Bloody hell. She couldn't really feel sorry for the git, could she? Regardless of whether she felt sorry for him or not, could she really pass up this opportunity to have Draco Malfoy in her debt? She slowed down.

Draco sensed her indecision and took advantage of it. "What do you want, Weasley?" he asked. "Money?"

Ginny made a derisive sound as she weighed her options. "I want you," she said finally, "to owe me a favor." Draco made a face at this. "Look, Malfoy, I'm not asking you to swear an Unbreakable Vow or something. Just to owe me a favor, equal to this one. There's got to be a way to arrange that, right?"

Draco nodded. "Fine, fine, fine," he said impatiently. "The thing is, Weasley, that nobody can know. You can't go running and telling all your Gryffindor friends that this is all for a bet. It's dead serious."

Ginny frowned at that. She'd imagined she'd just let a few people close to her know that this was a lark so they wouldn't think she'd been Imperiused or something. "Well, that just means that the favor you'll owe me will be that much bigger. It'll all work out, Malfoy," she said. "Is there still time for dinner?"

Rolling his eyes at her uncouthness, Draco nodded. "We might as well walk in together," he said, as if he was discussing his imminent funeral proceedings, and they moved towards the exit of the library.

As they approached the door of the Great Hall in silence, Ginny asked, "What happens if you lose this bet, anyway?"

Draco's already fair skin paled noticeably and took on a green tinge. "I'd rather not talk about it," he said weakly, and Ginny didn't press the issue. There were some things about Slytherin House she didn't care to find out. Besides, their grand entrance was upon them.

They walked towards the tables without notice at first, but a small buzz of chatter broke out as people began to watch them. Color started to stain Draco's cheeks. It pleased Ginny to see someone else blushing for a change, and she couldn't help but grin.

"You're blushing like a little girl, Malfoy," she said under her breath.

"Stuff it, you rotten bitch," Draco responded, trying to smile as if they were having some sort of civil discussion.

"Careful," Ginny responded. "I've still got time to change my mind." Draco merely hissed at her, covering it with another fake smile, and then they broke for their respective tables.

Ginny crammed food in her face and pretended oblivion as long as she could. Eventually, though, the amazed stares of her house mates had to be faced.

"What," she said, her mouth full so it came out all muffled, "is everyone looking at?"

Harry and Hermione looked rather uncomfortable and didn't respond immediately. However, her brother, never one for subtlety, jumped in with both feet. "What the hell were you doing walking in with that nasty git?" he questioned back, his ears turning a shade of red quite complementary to his hair.

Ginny sighed inwardly. Ron was so predictable it wasn't even funny to torment him anymore. "Draco," she said, pointedly using his first name, "offered to walk me to the Great Hall from the library."

Ron glowered more, Harry looked more confused than ever, and Hermione looked suddenly speculative. "He offered to walk with you?" she asked.

"Why were the two of you in the library?" Harry asked, almost at the same time.

"Well, the two of us happened to be in the library, and Draco wanted to ask me on a date next Hogsmeade weekend," Ginny answered, speaking as quickly as possible towards the end of her statement.

Ron couldn't say anything in response to this because apparently he was having some sort of episode, perhaps a heart attack, so Hermione had the chance to continue the conversation. Blinking in the exact same manner she did when confronted with an extremely difficult Arithmancy problem, she asked, "Why would he do that? You said no, didn't you?"

Ginny said nothing as she studied one of the floating candles near the ceiling and chewed her mouthful of bread about a hundred times longer than strictly necessary.

"You said yes?" Harry said, finally seeming to catch up with it all, in a tone somewhere between amazement and disgust.

"I did," Ginny responded somewhat haughtily, finally having gotten her dander up. If they just wouldn't make a big deal out of all this, she could get through the bet and everything would be fine. However, it appeared that instead they were going to meddle and act like she was still eleven.

"I don't see where it's any business of yours, anyway. It's not like you, or anybody else, had asked me." Harry looked somewhat abashed at this, but Ron opened his mouth to launch into what would surely be a tirade. Ginny raised her hand and made a noise in the back of her throat just like her mum did when she wanted Ron to shut it. Years of training worked like a charm, and he closed his mouth almost immediately, allowing Ginny to continue.

"You hate anyone I date, Ron. And some of those dates are stupid enough to be scared off by your pathetic blustering," she said, raising her voice for the benefit of Dean, who was shamelessly eavesdropping along with the rest of the table. "It's not like we're going to get married," she continued. "It's just a date."

"But why, Ginny?" Hermione asked in her most reasonable tone. "What could the possibly be the attraction?"

Bloody hell, what would the attraction be? "He's rich," she started and was greeted with groans. "Well, he's... cute," she then offered. She'd said it without thinking, but once the words left her mouth, she stopped to consider them. Draco really wasn't unattractive, if you somehow overlooked his odious personality. His coloring was striking, and his features were well-proportioned and classical.

Suddenly, she was tired of the conversation and just wanted to escape to her bed and draw the curtains. "You really want to know the truth?" she asked, dropping her voice conspiratorially. The others instinctively leaned towards her.

Ginny whispered, "Well, I heard Pansy Parkinson once in the library, gossiping, and she said that Draco has absolutely the most huge--"

She didn't have to even finish before the screeches started, and she took them as her cue to exit.

Ginny was walking to Potions alone, having managed to avoid everyone for most of the morning. Suddenly, her hand was grabbed from behind; this time, she wasn't even surprised.

"What is it, Malfoy?" she said disinterestedly, snatching her hand back and not even bothering to turn around.

Draco started walking with her when she didn't stop; the frantic look had returned to his face. "They don't believe me," he said worriedly. "They think you're in on it."

"I am," Ginny said, "so I guess maybe all Slytherins aren't stupid after all."

Draco made a noise of irritation. "This isn't funny, Weasel," he told her.

"Do you see me laughing, Ferret?" she rejoined, almost automatically, before going back to thinking over their plight.

"I reckon we'll have to, you know, spend some time together," she said finally. She was prepared for Draco's look of disgust, but it bothered her a bit anyway. "Look, you prat," she told him severely, "I've only heard stories about how you do it in Slytherin House, but in the rest of the Wizarding world, people that date actually like each other, and therefore they enjoy spending time together."

Draco nodded grudgingly. "That makes sense, I suppose. What do you suggest?"

She was about to suggest that he take his bet and shove it somewhere uncomfortable, but she realized that he'd actually been quite civil in asking her for her opinion. "What about meeting to study in the library tonight? Couples do that all the time, and if we actually do our schoolwork, then we really won't have to talk to each other."

Nodding in agreement, he said, "Bring your books to dinner, and wait for me when you're finished. We can walk down to the library together; that should help keep up appearances as well."

She realized that they'd reached the door of her classroom and that the students who were milling about inside were looking at them curiously.

His pained look at the realization that everyone thought he'd purposefully walked her to her class amused Ginny enough that she didn't have to fake a happy expression. "Smile, Malfoy," she said. "Nobody will believe you regard me with undying affection if being around me always makes you look like you're about to sick up."

Draco had rallied by then. He managed to not only smile sweetly at her but also reached out to squeeze her hand quickly, and she felt a brief moment of panic and surreality. She entered the classroom quickly, making sure to glower at everyone on her way to her seat so that they'd think twice about asking her any questions.

"I think I know how someone with Dragon Pox feels," Ginny told Draco. They were seated on one of the couches in the library, which were typically filled with students studying (or at least pretending to study). However, everyone was giving them a wide berth despite the fact that at the same time, they were being stared at. "I think pretending to date you is going to be worse for my reputation than I reckoned."

"Your reputation?" Draco shot back. "What reputation? I'm the one that stands to lose from all this."

Ginny rolled her eyes. "I've heard about your reputation, Lover Boy." A pleased smile curved Draco's lips until Ginny pointed out, "That wasn't a compliment. Aside from stories of your prowess, the only reputation you have is as a slimy git."

Draco elbowed her. Ginny laughed. "Good move, Malfoy," she told him. "Boys always hit girls they like, right?"

She went back to trying to study, but it was difficult with Malfoy squirming and grumbling beside her. It was going to be a long time until Hogsmeade weekend.

Quidditch practice had gotten her out of more studying with Draco, but had also resulted in more ribbing, though a few hexes and "accidents" had taken care of it. As far as her friends, she continued to basically avoid them, keeping a low profile and varying her routine, although Hermione had caught her going to bed late last night.

"There's more to this than what you're saying," she said, appearing unexpectedly as Ginny walked towards her room.

"What would make you think that?" Ginny responded blandly, not wanting to lie but also not wanting to ruin her and Draco's plan.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Whatever scheme you've cooked up with a Slytherin," she said, "you're still not that good a liar. I'll try to keep the boys from going too wild about it."

"That would be nice." They'd been better than they could've been, honestly, but Harry and Ron were still acting pretty stupid. Not as stupid as Lavender and Parvati though, who had decided that Draco and Ginny were soul mates, and wasn't their star-crossed, inter-house affair so romantic?

At any rate, there was no Quidditch tonight, so she headed to the library to find her star-crossed lover. His presence not immediately apparent, she went wandering through the stacks in search of him. A few shelves in, she was startled by a hissed, "Weasel!" and turned to find Draco.

Unfortunately, she wasn't the only one who was startled; a now scandalized Cho Chang was heading towards the front desk with an armful of books. "It's a pet name," Ginny said through her fake smile. "Rather sweet, don't you think?" Cho smiled back thinly and moved along.

"Way to go, you wanker," Ginny said, turning back to Draco. "If you keep acting like an arse, who the hell is going to believe we're dating?"

Looking pained, Draco pinched the bridge of his nose. "I'm sorry, Weasley," he said grudgingly. "This entire affair has put me under a significant amount of stress."

"I can understand, but I also have to say that you're the one that made your bloody mysterious bet in the first place." She hesitated, then went on. "And you're going to have to start calling me by my first name, even when nobody else is around. We've got to get in the habit; people will think it's weird if we don't use them." She paused again and then added, "Draco," feeling unutterably odd saying it.

"That's fine, Ginny," Draco rejoined, looking equally ill at ease. "Ginevra," he tried instead, moving his mouth strangely, like he was speaking a foreign language. "Ginevra," he repeated, more strongly. "I think I prefer that."

"Don't get all posh on me, Draco," Ginny replied, rolling her eyes. "Let's go sit somewhere and look like we can actually tolerate one another, shall we?"

"I don't think this is working," Draco fretted a few nights later as he seated himself on the couch next to her.

Ginny didn't even look up from her parchment. "Are you always such a ridiculously whinging girl?" she sighed, scratching out a few more words before glancing his way. "You've been walking me to classes, we've been studying together, what else do you want? I think this is just a prelude to some kind of perverted suggestion of public sex."

Draco's expression was a mix of sickened and speculating, but his voice was scornful as he said, "As if, Weasel."

"Whatever, Ferret," Ginny sniped right back. "You're a teenage wizard; it doesn't matter if you want me dead in a ditch, you'd take it if I offered it." She waited until he started to answer and then cut him off. "Especially because nobody else is going to offer it, since they think we're dating." Draco looked glum at this last part, because it was the truth.

Ginny was tired of this line of discussion; thinking about having sex with Draco was too weird, especially because she hadn't been joking the other night at dinner about the time she overheard Pansy. Draco's shoulder was touching hers, and she tried not to squirm, instead scooting away from him and turning as if she just wanted to be in a better position to speak to him.

"You're supposed to be good at this Potions business; look at this part of my essay and tell me what you think, yeah?" she asked. Looking smug, he took the parchment she offered, and her moment of discomfort passed.

After two weeks or so, Draco and Ginny seemed to have run out of insults and were therefore forced to make actual conversation. Mostly it was about Quidditch, a subject on which they were both conversant. Draco actually knew a great deal about many things and was quite intelligent; when Ginny thought about that, it didn't seem fair that he should be rich, smart, and good-looking. She supposed his generally insufferable personality was a black mark against him, but on the other hand, she didn't think it would really stop him from getting whatever he wanted in life.

Which were decidedly odd things, to be sure; her family might also be "pure" in Wizarding blood, though she detested the term, but Draco's family and their outlook and goals were about as different from her family as from a Muggle's. She had the fleeting idea sometimes that if he'd been brought up differently, he'd be a much nicer person.

That wasn't her problem, though. She had one more week to get through, and then Saturday was Hogsmeade weekend, thank Merlin. Then this whole fiasco would be over.

"I must be hearing things," Ginny said, "because it's impossible that you said... that."

Draco adopted the superior look she had quickly become familiar with. It meant he was getting ready to lecture her. "We're close to our goal," he said, "but I think people are still suspicious. This would help."

"Suspicious that a cheap tart like you could go without for so long," Ginny ribbed him half-heartedly. She was thinking over what he said, and she could see his point. If she'd really been dating Draco, she would have already tried to meet up with him somewhere, or sneak out, or something. She thought of days past with Michael Corner and smirked a little.

"Come back from wherever you are, Ginevra," Draco said, startling her from her reverie, "and help me figure this out."

Even though there was logic to Draco's idea, it still wasn't appealing, and that made Ginny irritable. "Looks like you've already got it figured out, Lover Boy," she snapped.

She sighed heavily and then rubbed at her eyes. "I'm going to exchange my favor for millions and millions of Galleons when this is through," she grumbled.

Draco merely smirked at this comment. "Not a problem," he told her, and she had a very strong urge to kick him.

"You're an idiot, Draco," she informed him. "Be that as it may, it appears that I have to meet with you this evening. When and where?"

Standing in the doorway of the Room of Requirement, Ginny was momentarily dumbstruck. She crossed the room to an ornate king-sized bed. "What exactly does this room think we require?" she asked, fingering the bed's red velvet covering. It looked exactly like she imagined a whorehouse would.

"I'm sure I don't know," Draco said thinly, looking as if he didn't want to touch anything. "I must say this wasn't what I expected. I mean, it would be enough to give the impression that..."

"That we're in here shagging like mad?" she finished for him.

"Yes," he said, still looking around uneasily.

Ginny rolled her eyes and climbed up onto the bed. "You worry like an old woman. I hope that's just a result of the bet," she said, stretching out. "Because you're really ruining my image of Slytherins as effortlessly evil masterminds since you're always acting like such a bloody baby."

Draco gave her a nasty look but didn't respond as he gingerly sat in a tacky armchair with upholstery that matched the bed cover. "We're almost finished; tomorrow we can go on our date," he reminded her.

"I'm more worried about getting through tonight," she murmured, not bothering to open her eyes. She'd been really tired lately; maybe Gryffindors just weren't cut out for lives of deception.

Looking put out, Draco said, "It won't be that bad, Ginevra."

"I bet that's what you tell all the girls," she replied, yawning.

Though she didn't remember falling asleep, suddenly she was waking up in the Room of Requirement to Draco's shaking of her shoulder. Yawning and sitting up, she found him at the bedside looking stiff and strange. "Let's go," he said tersely.

"Alright, alright," she replied, standing and stretching. It was time for the highlight of their ruse, and they exited the Room hand in hand, heading for the Astronomy Tower. After much discussion (and bickering), they figured if they capped their evening out with a public kiss in Hogwarts' equivalent to Lover's Lane, then all speculation that their relationship wasn't serious should come to an end.

As they walked Ginny realized that logically, she was going to absurd lengths to ensure Draco won this bet. Somehow, though, it had become her goal as well; she and Draco were a team, and she couldn't stand losing. She'd do whatever it took, even if she was starting to feel like there were butterflies in her stomach.

They reached the tower, which was empty and drenched in moonlight. Draco still held her hand, and she turned her face up to speak softly in his ear. "There's nobody

around. Are we still going through with this?" She hoped, if they were actually being observed, it looked like she was whispering sweet nothings or something.

"Oh, I'm sure they're here," he whispered back. "Are you trying to welsh out on me, Weasel?"

That ticked Ginny off a bit, relieving some of her nervousness. She suddenly realized that this was a unique chance; she had a free pass to snog Draco Malfoy and perhaps knock him off his high horse a bit too.

"Of course not, Ferret," she whispered, smiling at her thoughts. Draco looked a bit suspicious at that smile, and when she ran her hands slowly up his chest to grab his shirt collar, his expression changed to positive panic.

"Don't be shy, Lover Boy," she said aloud, figuring that would work even for eavesdroppers. Realizing that he had no choice but to play along, Draco tried to relax. Ginny tugged on his collar, bringing his lips down to her own.

She was easy at first, pressing her mouth gently to his. As she broke away and then repeated the process, she felt some of the stiffness ease from his frame. Then she stepped in closer, sliding her hands around his shoulders, and whispered in his ear. "Don't be nervous, Draco," she said, "You've done this hundreds of times before." Then she licked his earlobe.

He muttered something that might've been a sullen, "Not hundreds." Ginny didn't really care; she had moved on to nuzzling his neck, feeling unexpectedly bold, and to be frank, more than a bit turned on. Now if she could just get Malfoy that way...

It was dead easy, really. A few kisses to the neck, a few more presses against his mouth, and then she started slowly moving her tongue over his lips. She could tell when he gave in; he gave a prissy little sigh, his arms around her lost their rigidity, and he opened his mouth.

He was an excellent kisser; she'd give him that. His mouth was always doing something exciting, and everything was right: the right amount of tongue, the right amount of licking, the right amount of teeth grazing her lips. Of course, she felt she was giving back as good as she got.

Ginny ran her hands lingering over his back. Draco pulled her against him, and she made a muffled sound of surprise against his lips. This close to him, she could feel that he really was enjoying it. She let herself be swept away by it a few more moments, relishing the slow ache building in her breasts, between her legs, tightening their embrace and deepening their kiss.

She had to bring them back to reality though. Breaking her mouth away, she took a few panting breaths, then kissed him once firmly. Then she whispered to him, "I didn't know that the rumors about you really were true."

Already dazed from snogging, Draco knit his brows together in further confusion. "Huh?" he said, in a rather addled manner. Ginny snuggled her head under his chin and then slowly ran her hand down from Draco's chest to the front of his trousers. She felt him hold his breath as she gave him a firm squeeze.

"You should tell Pansy Parkinson it isn't nice to kiss and tell," she said, trying not to laugh. Then she stepped away from him. "You don't have to walk me back, Lover Boy," she told him. Draco's expression was a wonderful mix of lust, confusion, and pique, and she felt a thrill go through her.

She blew him a kiss and walked back through Hogwarts' winding corridors, unable to help the extra swing in her hips. The Fat Lady smiled knowingly at the look on her face and didn't even bother to chastise her for being out late. And thank Merlin, there were Paravati and Lavender, whispering by the fire.

"I'm tired, girls," she said, her voice unusually husky. "Going straight to bed." Let them make of that what they would, Ginny thought, confident that she knew what they would assume, and she continued up the stairs.

The bright light of morning was different than the moon light of the night before, and Ginny awoke with some misgivings about her antics. She fretted a bit while she showered and dressed. What was done was done, she eventually decided, and it wasn't like Draco could really be mad at her. He'd asked her to kiss him--begged her, really. And after all, it wasn't like he was some blushing virgin.

Still, she felt an unusual nervousness and decided to skip breakfast, instead waiting until it was time to leave for Hogsmeade and going directly to meet Draco. She found him waiting in the crowd. He took her hand rather perfunctorily and merely said, "Good morning." They walked in companionable silence, and Ginny figured that maybe they just wouldn't talk about what happened.

Once they were finally seated with their respective butterbeers at the Three Broomsticks, Ginny felt awkward and was tired of the weird silence. "Well, this is it then," she said. "You reckon it's worked?"

Draco, swallowing a mouthful of butterbeer, nodded. He seemed to start to say something and then glanced around the crowded pub with a vexed expression. He leaned in, trying not to be too obvious. "I think it did," he said. "Can't be totally sure until this evening," he continued, "but I'm quite confident."

"Imagine that," Ginny laughed. "Draco Malfoy, quite confident. What an unusual situation."

Draco tried to look put-upon, but he wasn't really annoyed. Then he said awkwardly, "Thank you, Ginevra." She felt a bloody blush trying to work its way up, so she took a long swallow of her drink.

"Don't thank me, Malfoy," she said in what she hoped was a tough voice. "You owe me, after all. It's not like I did this--"

"Out of the goodness of your heart, I know," he finished for her in a bored tone. "You're getting predictable, Weasel."

"Shut it, Ferret."

They walked slowly back towards Hogwarts, creeping to a snail's pace once they were almost there. However, they couldn't very well stand still, and so get there they did. It was time for them to dissolve their partnership, and Ginny suddenly felt like the ridiculous girl she often accused Draco of being.

So what if she never spoke to him again? He was a slimy git, after all, and she'd be well-rid of him. But sometimes, he was actually pretty funny, a traitorous part of her whispered, and it was nice to have someone around that didn't mind going on and on about Quidditch. And what about that kiss?

Ginny gave herself a mental kick in the arse and told herself to get it together. "Well, Malfoy," she said, standing at the steps with him. "I'll let you know when I need you to perform some horribly difficult feat for me to fulfill your debt." The corners of his mouth twitched a little. "Otherwise, have a nice life," she finished. She wondered if she should shake his hand or something, but that might just make her look like a prat.

She was turning to go when Draco said, "Ginevra, wait." She turned back to him, not sure whether she was pleased or dismayed. He had his superior expression on, but he seemed to be having trouble deciding what to say.

Finally, he spoke. "I've found that I've, ah, grown unexpectedly fond of your company these past few weeks."

Ginny rolled her eyes at his stilted formality. "You mean, you've started to fancy me a bit?" she asked him. "You could just say that, you know. This isn't one of your mum's soirees or something."

"Yes, I have," Draco responded in exasperation, "although at the moment I can't imagine why. You have to be one of the most unpleasant girls in all of Hogwarts. Perhaps all of England."

Ginny narrowed her eyes at him. "Coming from you, that's probably the highest compliment a witch could receive," she rejoined. "And I can't say that I find my interest in spending time with you any more sensible, since you're a ridiculous prat."

Draco crossed his arms. "At least we're even then," he said.

Ginny let out a long breath. "This is insane, Malfoy. This will never work."

"Where's your unstoppable Gryffindor confidence?" Draco asked.

"I've been hanging out with a Slytherin too much," she answered.

He reached for her hand. "Hang out some more, Ginevra," he told her. "If your Gryffindor confidence is ebbing, I can help you get some Slytherin sneakiness."

"There's a charming offer," she laughed. "I guess there wouldn't be too much harm in it. You're going to have to do a bit more wooing before you get me back up to the Astronomy Tower, though." Ginny thought Draco looked rather downcast at that.

They walked up the steps together, still holding hands, and Ginny felt strangely self-conscious. Draco looked at her curiously. "Are you blushing, Ginevra?" he asked her.

"Maybe," she replied defensively. "It's just making me feel weird, holding your hand."

"But you've been holding my hand for weeks now," he pointed out reasonably.

"Yes," Ginny said. "But this time, it's for real." And even though she rolled her eyes at the smug expression that brought to his face, she really didn't mind it at all.