

The next night followed the same way as the first time. And the night after that, and the night after that. They had practically perfected the silence charm and the contraception charm, and when they were spent, laying underneath the sweaty sheets and holding each other as if the world were ending, they would talk about everything. Past memories, work, what they thought the future would be like.

**Comment [AW1]:** Those horny little bunnies!

**Comment [AW2]:** Well it can't all be sex can it?

Hermione didn't want to work for the ministry, not trusting it after the previous overthrow. She saw how simple it had been to take a few death eaters, put them in the right place, and have the entire ministry in their hands. She wanted to be a muggle lawyer, using her magic only for research in helping the wizard community.

Fred, well, Fred was happy with his shop, and that was all he wanted.

As the sun rose above the Weasley house on a mild June morning, Fred woke to the same sight that kept his nightmares at bay. Hermione's hair was a tangled blonde cloud above her head, her lips slightly parted, the smallest bit of pink tongue sticking out between her teeth. Her eyes were clenched shut, as if she were trying to milk every last second out of her sleep. He kissed her forehead.

"C'mon sleepyhead. Time for work!"

She rolled over, groaned. "Nooooo..."

He sat up, clapped his hands together over his head. "Then you give me no choice!" He held his index fingers above his head, like guns. "I'ma givin' you one last chance little lady."

She glanced at him over her shoulder. "You wouldn't dare..."

He pounced on her, jabbing both index fingers on either side of her. She squealed, rolling out of the bed, taking all of the sheets with her. Through his rib vibrating laughter, he could hear the growl of what sounded like a mother bear from the other side of the bed. "You had better start running." She leaped onto her feet, grabbed a pillow. "Fred Weasley, your bum is mine!"

**Comment [AW3]:** This was the cutest scene to write.

"Well we know that!" he laughed, which earned him a smart smack with the pillow. "Ah!"

She chased him about the room, thwacking him with the pillow as he ducked for cover in the closet. Their antics were interrupted with a familiar roar from downstairs.

"WHAT THE BLAZES IS GOING ON UP THERE?!"

Hermione stuck her head out the door. "Nothing Mrs. Weasley! Fred's just being a git!"

"Fred! Stop tearing the house down!"

**Comment [AW4]:** I wonder how many times she's had to say that to the twins?

"SHE STARTED IT!" he yelled from the closet.

Downstairs, Molly Weasley rolled her eyes. "Quit bugging Hermione and get ready for work! Have yer own business and all and still livin' with your mother! What will the ladies think?"

Molly Weasley was not, in fact, oblivious of what was going on with the two of them. In fact, her motherly intuition noticed the smiles they were giving each other, the moments they were both gone at the same time, and when they came back they looked like a windstorm had howled through the valley.

**Comment [AW5]:** All mom's have eyes in the back of their heads.

She was all too aware of it. She just did her motherly duty and said nothing. She was happy that she didn't hear Fred's cries of torture in the middle of the night anymore. They were starting to give her her own nightmares.

Molly smiled at the secret snicker they shared, the sound of the shower overhead. The burrow was beginning to stir, and as she flipped through the mail, she put her hopes on all her fortune that her full house wouldn't empty too quickly.

Something caught her eye. The ministry's mark. They hadn't gotten a letter from the ministry in over a year. Anxiety crept into her throat as she opened the parchment, gave it a swift lookover.

"FRED!" she cried. "COME DOWN HERE RIGHT THIS INSTANT!"

Fred, only half dressed, clambered down the stairs, pulling up his pants as he went. "I know yer mad at me, but there's no need to shout-,"

"No no no! Not that! Here!" She thrust the parchment into his hands. "It's the ministry! They're coming tomorrow!"

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The family was huddled around the table that evening for an emergency 'family' meeting. Harry, Ginny, George, Fred, Hermione, Ron, Molly and Arthur sat awkwardly for a moment, the silence deafening in the large, and usually boisterous room.

"Oh Fred, please don't go," Ginny begged. "It's the ministry!"

Fred sighed. "I know..."

"Now Fred," Molly replied. "This is your decision. Don't let any of us tell you what to do. If you want to go to this new...thing...at Saint Mungo's, then that's your right."

"No brother of mine is going into some brain washing facility without me!"

"George, this is Fred's choice-,"

"I agree with George Mom," Ron said. "Even though Fred is a selfish twat."

"Ron!" Hermione glared him down.

"It's been almost six months Ron! Get over yerself!" George yelled back at his younger brother.

There was a scuffle as Ron almost leaped over the table at George, Harry breaking his trajectory. Suddenly, a booming voice, only heard by few in the Weasley household, shook the room.

“ENOUGH!!!”

The room was silent. Arthur Weasley stood, hands firmly placed on the carved wooden table, his face almost the same color red as his hair. “This has nothing to do with your reproductive systems and everything to do with Fred! Now, I don’t care what is going on between the lot of you, but we are going to start this as a family and we are going to END this like a family. Do you understand?!”

The group nodded, even Molly Weasley. Even she, being married to him for as long as she had, had only seen this side of her husband a handful of times.

“If you don’t mind me saying Fred,” Hermione finally muttered, glancing at him, and with his approving look, continued, “if you do this study, you’d be helping the wizarding world as a whole. I mean, you are the only other person besides Harry to have survived the killing curse-,”

“And believe me, it’s not easy,” Harry said, trying to relieve tension.

“-and if it doesn’t take too long, you’ll be home in no time!” She smiled, doing her best to give off the impression that he should go.

“...and if it does take a while?”

She sighed. “Then that is a sacrifice that I, all of us, will be willing to make.”

Fred looked down at the parchment in his hands. *St. Mungo’s Psychiatric Facility*. It sounded terrible. Even the smiling witch and wizard on the front in their lab robes couldn’t quell the wrenching feeling in his stomach.

“I’ll think about it.” He muttered. He stood, his face darkening. “I’m not feeling too well. I’ll be going to bed now. G’night.”

The group watched Fred climb the stairs to his room. He had left the pamphlet on the table.

“So the ministry is really coming tomorrow?” Harry asked. Molly nodded.

“Thanks for giving us warning,” Ginny mumbled. Harry grabbed her hand under the table, squeezed in comfort.

“Well, we had best be ready for them,” Molly huffed. “Whether or not we want them here isn’t going to stop them from coming.”

“I’ll go talk to him,” said George. “Hermione, do you mind?”

**Comment [AW6]:** I didn’t know much about Arthur Weasley. I still don’t. But when I think about it, he wasn’t completely spineless. At this point, he’d been through the same amount of insanity the rest of them had been through. I like to think of him as an adult Neville in some cases. I think he’s a complete bamf. Now, no more comments till the end.

She shook her head, her body numb. Looking over at the parchment underneath the pamphlet on the table, she read it over and over again, wishing the words would just disappear. *I don't want him to leave. I don't want him to be a lab rat...*

"Why'd you tell him to go?"

Hermione jumped from her daydream with a start. Realizing that it was only Ron and herself in the room, she stood, suddenly nervous.

"I...better...get to bed."

"Hermione...I'm sorry."

She stopped halfway up the stairs, looking down at the poor ginger boy at her feet.

"I...I never meant to hurt you and all, and I was just hoping we could still be...ya know, friends." He held out his hand.

She smiled, grabbed his hand. "That would be lovely."

"Mind if we still talk for a bit?"

She looked him over, still unsure of him. He put his hands in his pockets. "Oh c'mon Hermione, don't look at me like a rapist."

Sighing, she sat on the smooth wood of the table, scratching at the flaking nail polish on her fingers. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Why did you want him to go?"

She didn't respond at first, wasn't sure what to say. "Well, I guess, like I said, it will be good for the wizarding community, and-,"

"Bullshit."

Hermione glared at him. "It is not!"

"You want him to stay as much as the rest of us want him to." He looked down at his shoes. "And even though he stole you away from me, he's still my brother, and I don't want him in the hands of those bastards down there, even if it's been 'reformed.' Load of crock if you ask me."

"Ron, Fred didn't steal me away. I went to him. And you're right." She hugged herself. "I don't want him to go. Something about it...it doesn't seem right."

They heard footsteps coming down the stairs. "Hermione?" It was George. "Oh, sorry. You busy?"

Ron shook his head. "It's fine. Fred doing better?"

George looked at Hermione. "He wants you."

She nodded. Looked at Ron. "Thanks."

"For what."

She gave him a brief hug, Ron's arms not even making it around her before she pulled away. "For coming back."

The feeling she had when she walked up the stairs was a mix of sadness and respect. Sadness for the friend who would never see her as just a friend, and the respect of knowing that he was willing to try.

With that knowledge in mind, she walked up the stairs to the one who needed her the most.

Comment [AW7]: