

The next morning, Hermione's eyes opened to a haze of darkness. Her mind realized there was something wrong when Fred's usual tangled batch of red hair wasn't next to her.

The next thing she realized was the soft thrumming of the shower running above her. An oddity for Fred, due to the fact that he usually didn't get up until noon. Seven thirty in the morning, to be exact. She rolled over, wrapping the sheet around her naked self. She had forgotten how cold the Burrow could be without the warmth of another human being next to her.

The smell of soap came down the hall as she walked up the steps towards the bathroom, the faint snoring from the adjoining rooms casting a peaceful spell about her. What would it be like, not hearing his ragged breath in her ear at night? Not feeling his warm chest on her back? The tears almost fell, but she stopped them before she hit the bathroom door. *He needs me to be strong*, she thought. *So I'll be strong for him.*

She opened the door, knowing that he was there, his silhouette outlined in the shower curtain. He was leaning against the wall, arms outstretched, his back releasing tense muscles under the stream of hot water. His head hung low, letting the water sluice over him.

The sheet slipped off her shoulders to the tiled floor, forgotten. She pushed the curtain aside, climbed in the claw foot tub with him. Wrapping her arms around his torso, she held him close. "Whatever you're thinking, I will love you, no matter what you decide."

He shivered. "Hermione...do you think we fell into this too fast?"

She lifted her head, trying to hide the hurt inside her. "Fred. Look at me." He turned around slowly, but even though he wouldn't look her in the eye, she cupped his face, made him look. "Love is love Fred. I loved you before you asked. And when I saw you in the battle, when I saw you dead, I thought I was going to rip in two. But now you're alive," she whispered. "And when I think of how close I was to losing you, I thank all the powers that be that you're here with me."

Fred could see the redness in her eyes, the tears invisible in the shower. She looked like a mermaid standing in front of him, her hair gleaming wet, her body as beautiful as if it had been made of pearls.

"I...Hermione, I'm so scared." He pulled her close to him, pressed his face in her hair. "I don't know what to do. All I know is that I want you to come with me." He kissed her forehead, her eyes, her nose. "I love you."

"I know you do."

The awkwardness that filled the main room of the burrow that afternoon could have been cut with the sword of Gryffindor. Kingsley Shacklebolt, the Minister of Magic himself, was surrounded by gingers, Harry, and Hermione in a small room. Bill and Fleur had used floo powder that morning to support Fred, as well as Percy, to Molly's dismay. She exclaimed, "I just got the carpets cleaned!"

**Comment [AW1]:** Just as a note, I won't be commenting as much in this chapter. I do want to say that I want to make this fanfiction a big time thing, and I'm super excited to start! I've got the whole plot lined out, just not the details, so if you have any ideas on names, characters, good or bad, then definitely let me know. Right now, I'm thinking of a good villain, I just don't know who yet.

I'm so glad you guys have stuck with me!  
Bon Appetite!

Now they were sitting in all about the room, completely swarming the Minister. He began to sweat, sipping his tea silently as Fred read through the documents thoroughly, Hermione reading over his shoulder.

Shacklebolt coughed. "He will be watched twenty four seven by someone from the ministry. We ourselves have inspected the facility and note that it is in top condition. There is nothing to be worried about Mr. Weasley."

Fred looked up. "When can people visit?" He squeezed Hermione's hand.

"With the security of the place, not very often. The facility has a strict rule on visitors due to the several dangerous cases. They are highly secured however, so you won't have to be dealing with them."

Ron sniffed, hiding in the corner. "I still don't trust this rubbish."

"It's not your decision," Bill said calmly. "It's Fred's."

The minister could sense the tension in the family. "I'm terribly sorry that this has come as such a surprise to you, but if I may. The things we could learn from you, Mr. Weasley, would be phenomenal. We could study Mr. Potter here, but we know exactly why he survived. You, on the other hand, are a special case. In fact, you were not 'involved' with Miss Granger here until just recently. Therefore, we have no idea how you survived. If we could learn the reasons for your living, then we could cure this curse for good! Get the word out to wizards everywhere!"

Fred had heard it before in his head. Over and over he had thought of the good he would be doing for the wizarding world, what he would be doing for everyone who had been killed by the curse before him. Tonks, Lupin, even Mad Eye. But something held him back. Something scared him about this place. Being treated like a mental case had him completely nervous. He looked at Hermione, the understanding in her eyes. He could tell she didn't want him to go...

But it was what he had to do.

"Okay."

The minister stood from his seat, grabbed his hand. "Thank you Mr. Weasley, thank you! Of course, your family will not have to pay a cent since you are a volunteer for this. I will notify the ministry right away." He almost skipped to the fireplace, he seemed so pleased. "You will report to the ministry two days from now at 3 o'clock sharp!" And with that, Shacklebot disappeared in a cloud of green smoke.

Fred was in the process of signing the last of the paperwork when George reached out, grabbed the pen from his hands, and threw it across the room. "NO!"

Fred only looked up at his brother, a calm strength in him that no one had seen since the battle. "I have to Georgie. Don't worry. I'll be fine." He had a calm smile on his face, that only made his twin cry harder.

George was suddenly surrounded by his brother's arms, then Percy's, Ron's, Bill's and Ginny's in unison. Arthur and Molly's eyes welled with prideful tears. The siblings had always had a strong bond between each other. Their fights had been rough, their times of play even rougher, but when it came down to it, they were there for each other. No matter what.

That night, Fred began to pack in a fog, his mind not settling on one thing or another, but drifting to flickers of thoughts within his mind. Hermione watched him from the doorway, watching his trance as he moved from the closet to his suitcase on the bed.

He barely noticed when she sat down next to the case, folding some of the clothes that had been casually tossed in. "You fit more things in this way," she said.

Fred's haze didn't lift, but more shifted toward her. He pulled her close, pressed his lips firmly to hers. It was a searing kiss that started at her toes, melting the smallest bones in her feet, moving to her calves, her thighs, and up to the top of her head. She had enough energy to pull her wand out of her pocket, flick it at the door.

The door closed, latched with a little click, and the room was silent except for the soft sighs of the two lovers.

Fred wanted to make her feel beautiful. Make her feel the way he saw her. He pressed his face into her hair, taking in the scent of her shampoo. He kissed at her collarbone, that jutted just enough to make her beautifully angled. Ran his tongue around her belly button, loving the little dip in her stomach.

And when he finally reached her at her core, rubbing his palm gently against her, she all but moaned, the orgasm taking her slowly and gracefully to a peak she had never felt before. It brought her to tears.

He pulled her close before entering her, looked her in the eye before taking her one last time. Their coupling was slow and passionate, the moans between them creating a rhythm that picked up speed until the final crescendo, leaving them both panting and breathless, tangled in each other as they slowly fell into a peaceful sleep.