

# Rest in Laughter

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*Chapter 1 of 1*

Hermione holds Ron during Fred's funeral.

Ron tried to force himself to listen, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. The old wizard in front of him read Fred's eulogy, but Ron didn't hear a single word. It didn't matter so much anyway, since it probably didn't differ much from what had been said during all the other funerals Ron had attended over the last few days.

And there had been so many...too many for Ron to count. Freedom for the wizarding community had come at a high price.

Fred's funeral was one of the last. The Ministry had stepped in and scheduled all the funerals in alphabetical order. As tasteless as it sounded, there probably hadn't been any other way to solve the organisational nightmare that was the aftermath of the war against Voldemort.

Ron shivered.

On his left, Hermione tightened her arms around his waist. She had been by his side the whole time, and Ron was grateful for her presence. He felt like he would go to pieces without her. Still, Ron couldn't prevent another shiver when he looked at the casket, trying hard not to imagine Fred lying inside. On his other side, Harry gripped his shoulder in support.

Having his two closest friends next to him helped a lot, but it wasn't enough to ward off the hurt Ron felt at the loss of his brother. He knew it would take his family a very long time to recover from this pain.

While the old wizard in front, whose name Ron just couldn't care to recall, moved onwards in his sombre speech, Ron took a good look at his family. If possible, they seemed to be even worse than him. His mum was sobbing into his father's chest. Arthur held his wife, trying his best to comfort her, but it was obvious that he wanted nothing more than to break down himself. Ginny was holding onto her father's sleeve, looking incredibly young and lost. Silent tears were streaming down her cheeks; Ron couldn't bear to look at her for long.

But the sight of his other siblings was even more heart-breaking. George stood in between his two eldest brothers. He was staring at the casket, his face ashen and his eyes red from days of crying. If it weren't for both Bill and Charlie, George would have fallen to the ground. Behind them stood Angelina and Lee, their hands on George's back to show him that he wasn't alone. The sight of George was almost enough to undo Ron, and he quickly looked away.

Percy was there, too, even though he was standing a little to the side. He was pale as well, and even from the distance Ron could see his brother shaking. Distant relatives and countless of Fred's friends were standing behind the Weasley family. So many had come to say good-bye.

Ron redirected his gaze to the front, staring at Fred's casket once more. It was a dull wooden crate, covered in flowers. Fred probably thought it would look a lot better with some colour on it. Maybe some splashes of paint, or some dragon hide...

Ron froze. What an inappropriate thought. As if Fred would want a pretty casket. As if he would want to have a casket at all. Fred shouldn't need a casket; he should be

alive.

But try as he might, Ron couldn't stop thinking that if Fred was there in spirit somehow, he was probably bored out of his mind.

Ron shook his head, trying to get rid of these insane thoughts...but was unsuccessful. He saw Hermione glancing at him worriedly from the corner of his eye, but couldn't take his eyes off of Fred's casket.

He was in there. Did he know what was happening around him? What would Fred do if he were here with them?

All of a sudden Ron had a vision of Fred as a ghost, complaining that this was the lamest party he had ever been forced to attend. Fred would probably want them to dance around his grave.

Before his inner eye Ron could see how ghost-Fred was leading a conga line around his own casket. *Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa...tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa.*

The image was ridiculous, and Ron couldn't fight the insane urge to laugh. He had the sense to bury his face in Hermione's shoulder, her hair muffling his laughter.

*Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa.*

Ron couldn't stop, laughter shaking his whole body so much that it hurt. Then the laughter turned into sobs...violent and cruel outbursts that tortured his body. And all the while, Ron heard the cheerful conga rhythm.

*Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa.*

It was taunting him, mocking him for his weakness.

*Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa.*

He didn't know how long it took, but eventually Ron could hear Hermione's voice over the conga, soothing him, telling him that everything would be alright. The music faded into the background and the conga-line came to an end.

Ron didn't move. It occurred to him that he wasn't standing up on his own anymore and he briefly wondered how Hermione was managing to support his whole weight. Then he became aware of another pair of arms around his body and Ron realised that Harry probably was the one holding him upright.

Slowly, Ron located his own legs and began to put weight on them. He needed to stand on his own all of a sudden. It took a while, but eventually Ron found his balance, though neither Hermione nor Harry let go of him. Ron lifted his head from Hermione's wet shoulder, only to see that she was crying, too.

The funeral was already over, and the guests were slowly filing away to go to the reception, which was to be held at the Burrow.

"Your father took your mother home already." Hermione whispered when she noticed Ron looking around, searching for his family. "Your siblings escorted George. He wasn't doing so well either."

Ron nodded grimly. He was almost glad that he hadn't seen George break down.

"Are you ready to go?" Harry asked carefully.

Ron took a last look at the grave; the casket had already been lowered inside. Mercifully, there was no conga-dancing Fred in sight. Ron turned his back and let his two friends side-along Apparate him to the Burrow.

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Back home, Ron felt too drained to do anything. He rested his head on Hermione's shoulder, ignoring the discomfort due to their difference in height.

"Should we take him upstairs?" Ron heard Harry whisper to Hermione, but couldn't muster the strength to react to the question. He wanted to be in Hermione's arms; where they were didn't matter to him.

"Let's go outside." Hermione decided, and she slowly walked Ron forward.

Ron didn't even look up to see where they were going, letting her lead him along. The fresh air didn't make much of a difference; there had been enough air at the funeral. Ron just continued to hold on to Hermione, his head buried in her shoulder.

"Ron, do you want something to eat?" Hermione asked softly. Ron shook his head, hoping she could feel his answer.

"I really think you'd feel better with some food in your stomach," Hermione insisted. Harry didn't say much, but Ron didn't mind. He hadn't known what to say to him when Sirius had died either. They had Hermione for that. Ron reluctantly raised his head to look at her face.

"Let's go sit over there and have a bite," Hermione tried to persuade him, pointing to an almost empty table. Percy was its only occupant, sitting on one of the benches and staring unseeingly ahead. There were more tables around. The Burrow could have never held all the mourners, so they had to move the reception partially outside.

Hermione gently lead Ron towards the bench and table, and Ron followed, having no strength left to argue with her.

"Hey Percy," Hermione greeted kindly, before sitting down opposite of Percy, Ron right beside her.

Percy barely raised his head, shrugging at them.

"Are you alright, Perce?" Ron asked concerned, forgetting his own sorrow for the moment.

"Sure," Percy whispered. It was a blatant lie.

"Yeah," Ron agreed. What else was he supposed to say?

Luckily, Harry arrived at the table, levitating four plates and mugs ahead of him. He sat down next to Percy putting food in front of everyone.

Ron didn't feel like eating. In fact, he felt quite nauseous and his head was pounding. He took a few bites nonetheless, just so Hermione wouldn't worry too much. Hermione kept one of her hands on his knee while she was eating; she seemed to know that Ron needed to hold on to her.

Indeed, she had known whatever he needed for the last few days. She had been by his side constantly, speaking when he needed a distraction, silent when he wanted to think. She seemed to know whenever the pain became too much to bear, and when the despair threatened to swallow him. More than once Ron had been sure he would snap from the pain, only to have Hermione engulf him in a warm hug, showering his face with soft kisses. It never failed to pull him back from the edge.

Ron also knew that they ought to discuss the state of their friendship or rather relationship soon. It had transformed when they had kissed during the battle, although it had started to change long before that moment. However, Ron couldn't muster the energy for that conversation at the moment, and he trusted that Hermione knew what she meant to him without him actually saying the words. She would know when it was best to talk about them, about their future. She always knew these kinds of things.

For the moment Ron just needed to hold her.

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The reception was a quiet affair. Mrs. Weasley had broken down completely, and Arthur had asked for a Healer to give her a Calming Draught. Hopefully, the dreamless sleep potion granted her some well-needed rest.

George on the other hand had refused anything the Healer offered. He remained sitting at one of the outside tables until late at night, surrounded by his friends and family, yet utterly alone.

Ron spent the most part lying on the bench, his head resting in Hermione's lap. Her hands were stroking his arms and forehead, and the soothing motions slowly relaxed him. He had closed his eyes, but he could still hear Hermione quietly talking to Percy and Harry. Ron was glad that his two friends were including Percy; he was at a loss as to how to make Percy feel better.

A little while later, Ginny and Luna joined their group. Ron had opened his eyes briefly, but couldn't see his sister because she was sitting on the opposite side. Hermione, however, noticed his questioning look. She smiled reassuringly down at him and mouthed, "Harry." Of course. Harry would take care of Ginny. Ron closed his eyes again.

He was almost asleep when he heard another person approaching them, quietly speaking to Hermione.

"Bill sent me over," Fleur whispered in her heavy French accent. "Everything alright?" Ron could feel how someone spread a blanket over him. Fleur had probably brought it.

"Yeah, we're fine." Hermione answered, and Ron could feel her tucking the blanket safely around him. Her voice was the last thing he heard before drifting off.

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It felt like he had only slept for seconds when Hermione shook him awake.

"It's late, let's get you upstairs."

Ron blinked, trying to figure out his surroundings. He was still lying on the bench outside, but it was dark now. His back was stiff and ached. Although Hermione's lap was soft, the bench was not. He got up with difficulty, feeling tired and worn out. Harry was standing by his side, helping him to stand. Supported by both Harry and Hermione, Ron made his way inside, already half-asleep again.

Once they reached Ron's bedroom on the top floor Harry and Hermione obviously meant to put him down on his bed...only Ron refused to relinquish his hold on Hermione.

"Shh, Ron, let go," Hermione whispered into his ear. "You need to sleep."

"Nooo, don't." His words came out as a garbled mush. "Don't leave me alone." He was holding onto her shirt tightly.

"Okay, Ron," Hermione soothed. "I'll stay with you, just let me go get my pyjamas and check that someone stays with Ginny."

Reluctantly, Ron weakened his hold on her and Hermione quietly pulled away. Ron heard her walk out of the room, but was too exhausted to lift his head to watch for her return.

"Come on, let's get you ready for the night." Harry was still there, and dragged Ron upright again. Together they made the short way towards the bathroom. Ron's eyes were mostly closed, too exhausted to care. He felt Harry undress him and in the back of his mind he knew that he would be embarrassed later. Harry got him to take a quick shower and then helped him put on his pyjamas. By the time the two friends arrived back at Ron's room, Hermione was already sitting on Ron's bed in her nightgown.

"Charlie is staying with Ginny tonight," she said when Ron joined her on the bed. Ron nodded, relieved. He curled up besides her, letting her tuck the blanket around him once more.

"Go to sleep, Ron," she whispered in his ear.

But for all his exhaustion, sleep wouldn't come. Ron lay close to Hermione, her even breaths soothing, but not enough to lull him into sleep. The occasional snores from beside his bed told Ron that Harry was already asleep on his mattress.

*Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa.*

Fred's ghost was haunting him again, mocking him for his silent tears. Ron shivered uncontrollably.

"Ron, what's wrong?" He couldn't tell whether Hermione had been awake the whole time after all or if he had woken her, but now he could see her eyes looking at him worriedly in the dim moonlight.

How was he supposed to explain that he kept seeing his dead brother dancing conga around his grave? She would send him straight to St Mungo's.

"Ron?"

He had to tell her something.

"Do you think that was the funeral Fred would have wanted?"

"What do you mean?"

Ron took a deep breath. This was Hermione, he reminded himself. He could tell her anything.

"I keep thinking he would have wanted a party instead. For us all to celebrate, not to be so sad."

Ron buried his head in Hermione's hair. If she thought him crazy, he didn't want to have to look at her.

"You're probably right." Hermione replied to Ron's astonishment. "Fred would have wanted all of you to be happy."

"But I keep seeing him dancing conga," Ron whispered feverishly. "Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa, I hear it all the time. I'm going crazy."

"No, you're not," Hermione assured, stroking his hair and kissing his forehead softly. "You remember him the way he was. I think that's a very good thing."

Ron remained quiet.

"Try to sleep, Ron." She kept stroking his hair until he finally calmed down enough to sleep.

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The kitchen at the Burrow was crowded during breakfast. Ron was there, Harry and Hermione at his sides. Charlie had an arm around a pale Ginny, urging her to try some of the scrambled eggs. Bill and Fleur were sitting across from them and Percy, too, had stayed at the Burrow.

George was looking miserably down at his plate, pushing the food around that Angelina had put in front of him. By the looks of it, neither Angelina nor Lee had left George alone last night.

Mr. Weasley was sitting at the head of the table, looking older than ever, but otherwise composed. Mrs. Weasley had yet to stop crying. She was, however, busying herself with cooking even more breakfast. When her hands shook so much she couldn't properly cut the tomatoes for the omelettes, Fleur wordlessly rose from beside Bill and assisted her mother-in-law.

For all the people assembled in the small kitchen, it was unnaturally quiet. The clattering of the tableware was the only sound filling the room. Nobody spoke.

Until George suddenly mumbled, "We failed him." His voice was raw with grief.

At first, nobody seemed to be able to say anything. The kitchen was truly quiet now, all movement had ceased.

"Son, I assure you," Arthur Weasley finally said gravely, "there is nothing anyone of us could have..."

"That's not what I mean," George interrupted, his voice rising uncontrollably and breaking. Lee gripped his shoulders. George looked like he would topple over any second. His face did not disguise the fact that his pain was beyond anything they could ever imagine...all consuming, physical, and heart-wrenching.

Ron had to force himself to even look at his brother.

"Yesterday," George tried to explain, his voice contorted with anguish. "Fred... must have been so disappointed." The silence was deafening.

"He always said a funeral should have music and laughter. After all, it's the last party one attends. There should have been fireworks... Fred loved fireworks." George broke off, completely spent.

It was Angelina who finally broke the silence, "Then we'll have fireworks tonight."

"Yes," Lee agreed immediately. "I'll help you set everything up."

"Think about it," said Charlie, "it'll be like the party lasted two days."

Mrs. Weasley had already turned to the stove, trying to organize the food for the evening, Ginny and Fleur ready to help her. Everyone else rose from their seats, discussing what needed to be done before the evening.

"Fred would have liked that," George whispered dejectedly.

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Ron watched another two rockets rise high into the air where they exploded into two gigantic showers of red and gold stars. He could hear quite a few people clapping, some were even cheering. Everyone who had been at the funeral the other day had come back to give Fred a proper farewell. Fred would have been proud of them all.

A small smile appeared on Ron's face. The pain was still there...undiluted and raw...but at the same time he was able to breathe a little more easily.

"Tam-tam, tam-tam, tam taaa." Ron froze. It took him a few seconds to realise that he had not gone barmy after all, but that Hermione had softly hummed the blasted conga rhythm into his ear. He looked down at her incredulously.

"I told you, you're not going crazy. You were right about Fred needing a suitable farewell," she whispered, briefly rising on her toes to give him a peck on the cheek. Ron tightened his arms around her. He hadn't let go of Hermione for more than a few minutes at a time these past two days. He hoped she knew that he planned on never letting go.

His smile widened as he pulled their bodies flush together, encircling her waist tightly with both arms. Still smiling, he lowered his head to hers and captured her lips in a kiss. This kiss wasn't anywhere near as gentle as the ones she had bestowed on him during the course of the last few days. It was hot, demanding, and when his tongue joined hers, Ron moved one hand towards the back of Hermione's head to bring her even closer to him.

Ron was convinced that somewhere up there Fred was giving him two thumbs up.

The End

A/N: Normally, I completely ignore the possibility that my favourite Weasley could have died during DH. However, this piece just had to be written. Fred's there in spirit, I promise. :)

I just wrote this in between studying and cleaning my room because the plot-bunny came, clubbed me over the head and held me hostage until I wrote the fic. As you can see, I didn't have a choice. ;)

Many, many thanks to the awesome dynonugget for the incredibly quick beta. You rock.

Hope you liked my story. Please review, I could really use some cheering up during those last few days of studying like a maniac.