

Mirror Image

by HogwartsHoney

George deals with his brother's death.

Chapter 1 of 1

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Sometimes, George sees his reflection in a mirror or shop window and thinks that it's Fred. Lately he's taken to staring at his reflection in the mirror at the shop, scrutinizing every detail of his face, and trying to remember where he and Fred differed. Was it a freckle on the left side of his nose that Fred didn't have? Or was it that one of Fred's eyebrows was slightly higher than the other, whereas George's are perfectly level?

George doesn't know whether it upsets him more that he cannot remember the differences, or whether the differences no longer matter.

He looks into the mirror and sees Fred.

And his heart aches.

George has never thought about a life without his twin. They had often joked that their combined lifetimes still wouldn't be enough for all the pranks and inventions they had planned out, and even that year of the Triwizard tournament when they'd tried to defy the age line, as they'd grinned at each other in the split-second after jumping over it, they'd known that they would go through this life together. Forever.

But forever's been and gone.

George still goes to work each day even though the memories of Fred are everywhere. He doesn't look at the sign above their door any more, because now the possessive is on just the one "Weasley", and sometimes that is almost too much to bear.

There's a mirror in the hallway between the shop and the store room, and George is tempted to take it down. Every time he passes, he sees Fred out of the corner of his eye, and even though he averts his gaze and concentrates on what he needs to get out of the inventory, Fred is still there, walking with him. George knows that if he looks at Fred, his brother will be smiling. George always smiled when he saw Fred, because it was like looking at himself. In a mirror. Every time.

They had purchased only Muggle mirrors when they opened their shop as they didn't want the magical ones talking about their inventions with the customers or giving them any warnings. At first it was strange, these silent Muggle mirrors, but now, George finds it almost a blessing, for he knows that he will never have to discuss with a piece of furniture just why his brother doesn't come around any more.

George has only one mirror at home, in his bathroom: a simple, Muggle-made, oval, wooden-framed mirror. Even so, he can barely look at it long enough to run a brush through his hair. Fred used to laugh at George's hairdressing technique, saying that he'd obviously hung around with Harry for too long and had picked up his bad habits. George would pause for a beat and then reply with a grin that the 'just-shagged' look was the latest craze in hair fashion. It had become a standing joke.

Fred doesn't joke about anything any more.

Neither does George.

This morning, George drags himself out of bed and stumbles into the bathroom. He washes his face and runs a still-wet hand through his hair as he looks up at the mirror. Fred's face is drawn, with hollow-looking eyes that seem to sink back into his skull. Fred has looked better. George takes a deep breath and feels the loss of his brother

stab at his insides more acutely than ever, and it is all he can do to look at the face before him.

"Hi, Fred," he murmurs brokenly.

"Hi, Georgie."

The soft voice and pure adrenaline rush of fear makes George feel as though his very blood freezes and then boils in his veins. His heart pounds in his chest as a heat rushes over his body, and he feels every single nerve ending standing at absolute attention. He belatedly realizes that he has dropped into a semi-crouch, the battle stance coming so naturally to him after the war. He listens, straining his senses to detect any movement in the house, but as the seconds bleed into minutes without another sound, he relaxes slightly and almost chuckles, silently admonishing himself.

The mirror hangs impassively on the wall and George chances another look at it, to see if his face has changed after the nasty shock he's just had, but it's still only Fred. Fred's face looks back at him from the mirror, and George is so confused and numb with grief that he simply accepts that it *is* Fred, that it's not a reflection at all, but that his brother has come back to him.

His Fred.

The breath that escapes George is short and it quavers, but he barely feels it or even hears it because the only thing he can concentrate on is that *Fred* is before him, albeit in a mirror. He opens his mouth, needing to make the connection again, to talk with his brother once more, but he's not even sure of what to say.

"Georgie, you look a right mess," Fred murmurs.

George swallows hard and scarcely dares to breathe for fear of breaking this moment.

"I've had better days, Freddie." His voice cracks a bit at the end as he stumbles over his brother's name, but Fred just nods, slowly, carefully, as though he understands. Of course he would; they never had to explain things to each other, they just *knew*.

George tries to hold back the sob that threatens to break loose from his chest because he doesn't want to cry in front of Fred; no, he needs to be the strong one for both of them, for everyone. Indomitable: isn't that them? Fred 'n George.

Fred looks thoughtful, and for a while there's silence between them. George tries to think of something to say, but he can't seem to think straight anymore. It's almost as though he's under a really good Confundus Charm, and part of him wishes he had the presence of mind to look around for the would-be caster.

Just then, Fred starts speaking again. "Look, about the shop. Let Ronnie help out, yeah. Make him a partner; that'll be better. Then the name can go back to the way it should be. Doesn't look right any other way."

George nods, part of his mind hearing the words, but a much larger part wondering whether this is in fact what it feels like to go insane. He thought it would have taken longer, somehow, for him to completely lose his mind, but Fred would joke that there's only one mind between the two of them anyway, so he'd really only have his half to lose.

George finds the thought oddly amusing and something bubbles in his chest, deep down, almost unpleasant, but not quite. It's a disturbing feeling, and it's moving, whatever it is, fighting its way up through his throat and out his mouth. His body convulses: a brief, almost twitch-like movement, and he makes a sound, an odd grating sound, more of a bark than anything else. For a moment, George wonders whether he's managed to accidentally ingest one of their Canine Caramels, but he's at home, not the shop, and he doesn't bring any of their merchandise home anymore. The thought is replaced with the realization that the sound he just made was a laugh.

The bubbles continue, and he finds that more and more of them work out through his mouth, ripping through him until he's laughing hysterically, laughing until he's almost sick with it. He grips the sides of the sink with both hands and tries to steady himself, but he can't stop, can't prevent the sounds from tearing through him, can't stop the tears from coursing down his face, and he can't. Stop. Shaking.

Perhaps minutes, perhaps hours later, George finds himself on the cold floor of the bathroom. He feels empty, hollowed out, and as he clammers to his feet, he is both afraid to see Fred and afraid that he won't see him either. He's never felt this kind of fear; it seems to twist in his veins, coiling in his blood and striking him at his very core. What if he's lost his twin, again, just when he's found him once more?

Slowly, George straightens, averting his gaze from the mirror for a long moment until he feels strong enough to actually look. The same face greets him, drawn, eyes still hollow, but perhaps there's a bit more colour to the cheeks and skin than before.

George reaches out to brush his fingers along Fred's cheek, but he only touches cold glass. He pulls back in surprise, but then touches the mirror again, slowly this time, carefully, to assure himself that, while it is his reflection, it is also Fred, still there and always a part of him.

"So, I'll see you around, yeah?"

In the mirror. Every time.

His heart is still heavy, but his mind is clear for the first time since... well, since Fred died.

~end~