

A Birthday Wish

by Gelsey

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Chapter 1 of 1

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"Happy birthday to you."

Charlie stared wordlessly at the cake his mother carried. It was a simple cake, like it had been every year since he could remember. Chocolate cake, his favorite, complemented perfectly by white icing.

The lettering was in red, as always—Weasley red, they'd always joked.

Now, it only looked like blood. Blood, like the thin line that trailed down Fred's face when Charlie had fetched his body. Charlie'd wiped it off before his mother could see and burned his clothes afterward.

He swallowed back the memory that made him want to gag and pasted a smile on for his family.

"Happy birthday to you."

Molly's hands shook as she set the cake down. Impulsively, Charlie reached out and squeezed her hand, finding a kind look to give her despite wanting nothing more than to flee this party and the chokingly forced, cloying cheerfulness.

The circle of family stuffed in the dining room felt stifling, but it was too cold to have the party outside. He longed to flee to the reserve, but this was the first birthday since the end of the war when everyone could get together. He hadn't been able to deny his mother when she'd suggested it, teary-eyed in his fireplace.

"Happy birthday, dear Charlie."

He pretended he didn't see his mother's eyes fill with tears or George turn away, unable to handle the pain of the memories.

Charlie's heart ached for the raw wound of his family, throbbing painfully with every beat of their hearts. He was all too aware of the fireproof balaclava scrunched up on his head, a tradition started years ago when the twins' prank singed Charlie's eyebrows off on his tenth birthday. It felt like a lead-filled hat of grief, a dark beacon for the banshees drawn to heartache. The flecks of candlelight blurred, but he sniffed the tears back.

"Happy Birthday to you."

Charlie closed his eyes, wondering what to wish for. He knew what he wanted, but there were too many candles on the cake for him to believe it would ever come true. Fred couldn't come back; things couldn't be like before.

No matter how much he wanted it. No matter how much he hurt.

There was one thing he could wish for, though. He opened his eyes and leaned forward, blowing out all the candles in one blow of air.

Please, let this family heal, he wished.

"Happy birthday," his family said. It wasn't, but maybe it would be someday.

A/N: Winner of round 2 of cw_ldws on LJ.