

Recovery Continues: Believing is Seeing

by dracontia

Not all scars are visible. The most insignificant event could trigger a flashback... or healing. A sequel to 'A Credit to Their Houses,' chronologically just after the end of chapter 6.

one-shot, 'A Credit to Their Houses' sequel

Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: Weasleys, Potters, and assorted wives are property of JKR, whether en route to St. Ives or wandering the mansions of my mind. I profit but in the exercise to my writing muscles.

Audrey and Fleur escaped after dinner, having volunteered to watch the younger children. The meal had been somber, the conversation stilted. Of one accord, the adults had decided not to discuss Fred in front of the remaining children. There hadn't been any alcohol served, but judging by his face, George had primed the pump well before arriving. That was another reason for the relative silence; most of the people around the table were biting their tongues as much as the food, indulging in the family pastime of Not Noticing George's Drinking.

Ron, for his part, had no trouble keeping quiet. He had never been less interested in discussing George' spoiled little terror...not when there were much more serious issues for the family to deal with. Hermione had insisted they deal with that in their own home, apart from the rest of the family. Ron preferred to deal with it by charging into Hogwarts, wand blazing. No matter; they'd work it out later.

There must be some way to rescue my Rosie from that snake pit. I always knew Al was a bit mental, and it only took mixing with some Malfoy spawn to push him over the brink. There must be something we can do, now that Neville's second from the top. Has anyone ever corrected a miss-Sorting before?

The kitchen, the largest room in the house, was full to bursting. Even Charlie's graying, scarred head flickered tiny in the flames of the stove. Mum still didn't trust the Stove-Floo, even though it was only used for calls and not for travel. Ron personally found it weird, but it was the easiest option for Charlie; he had a hatchling to feed in two hours.

"Well," Dad said, pulling back from the table. While dad rarely had much to say in family meetings, he was somehow always expected to start them off. This time, he seemed to be at something of a loss. He wiped his glasses. He settled them back on his nose. He sipped his tea. Ron knew all of Dad's ways of stalling, and it looked as if he was going to use all of them.

"Oh, George! Didn't I tell you no good would come of spoiling him?" Molly fretted. Apparently the 'well' had been enough by the way of opening remarks. The discussion was on.

"Spoiled? If you want to talk about 'spoiled,' let's talk about that Malfoy kid's part in all this," George said. "There's no way he was an innocent bystander."

Harry looked ready to charge. Ron grabbed him by arm, which seemed to startle him. He blinked a moment, then gathered himself to react more calmly. That was okay. He and Harry did that for each other. Ron wondered what had set Harry off, though he supposed it would have to wait until Bill spoke his piece.

"It sounds as if Neville has it under control. Why not leave it in his hands? We can ask Dominique to keep an eye on him as well," Bill suggested.

Harry shook his head. He had it together now. *See, love? No 'counselling' needed* Ron thought, secure in the knowledge that Hermione did not know Legilimency. "It's not enough to keep him out of trouble at school, Bill. He's angry, and he was caught in the act of trying to vent his anger on a group that included members of his own family. Scorpius didn't do anything but show up on the train."

"How do you know all this?" George challenged.

"Believe it or not, I had a few questions when I got Al's letter and the cheerful news," Harry said. His wry tone prompted a few chuckles. Ron didn't quite see the humor. "I know Narcissa well enough through Andie that it wasn't out of line to visit."

Ron was pretty sure he heard a silent, *and ask her, what the hell happened?* at the end of that sentence.

"It just so happened that Scorpius' letter arrived at the same time. I was allowed to read it as they did. In case you were wondering, it wasn't tampered with." Harry looked at the piece of parchment he'd removed from his pocket, "Please don't worry about me. I've already made two friends on the train before I even reached school. It was like something in a book. Do you remember that Our Teddy's godfather is Mr. Potter, the Chief Auror? His son and niece are in the same year as I am, and there was some kerfuffle in the corridor and I was pushed into their compartment. They were ever so nice about it and invited me to stay!"

"Now, a bit later: 'Al figured out that my wand, your old wand, must be the one that Mr. Potter defeated Voldemort with. Is that true, Father? I think it must be, because Al is terribly clever. Why didn't you tell me? At any rate, it was a good thing that he figured it out. I think it might have been the only thing that kept one of his cousins from treating me very roughly when he met us on the train. That, and Al's brother James told him to clear off and stop making trouble. Rose threatened to write her grandmother. This is apparently a very grave step.'

No shit, Sherlock, Ron thought, a little dazed. The rest of the family interrupted the reading for a bit, vocalizing similar sentiments. Well, that put paid to any theories that Scorpius had started it. Rose would hardly threaten Fred with Mum if Fred wasn't completely in the wrong. *Well, maybe the Malfoy kid hasn't any worse qualities than being a bit of a toady; he and Percy have something to discuss, in that event.* Ron supposed there was a certain great cosmic joke inherent in a Malfoy playing tag-along to a Weasley-in-blood-if-not-in-name. He might have liked to have been a fly on the wall when the Malfoys read that letter. *If only those two little gits hadn't dragged Rosie down with them!*

Harry got everyone's attention back. "Once we were off the train, though, he fired some sort of firework at me. At least, Rose said Fred did it. I didn't see it. Thanks to Mr. Hagrid, I wasn't pitched into the lake. If I can get used to how very large Mr. Hagrid is, I think I could be fond of him. Al and Rose certainly are. Al has a great many cousins, you understand; the only one I am talking about is Fred. The rest were all quite polite."

Ron had the feeling that Harry was leaving something out there. *Probably something like, 'How very curious, father; I thought you said Weasleys were raised in a barn and had all the accompanying outhouse,'* Ron felt fairly confident in extrapolating an appropriately obnoxious sentence. He'd read enough of Percy's letters.

"Here's an interesting bit near the end: 'I hope you are pleased that I am in Slytherin. The Hat said my loyalty would serve me well in Hufflepuff, and it was very tempting; Lysander and Lorcan are decent fellows, which I think must reflect well on their House. But I couldn't help it, Father; I would have always wondered if I did it out of fear, and Rose swore she would never forgive me if I took the easy way. I couldn't bear it if she wouldn't forgive me. And Al and I didn't want to be in the same House as Fred. So that left Ravenclaw or Slytherin. Al and Rose are very clever, but I wasn't sure how they felt about revising. I know I don't like it much. So Slytherin seemed the best way to go.

'I do hope I chose rightly, though; poor Rose is terribly afraid she will be disowned. Do you think that would happen? Who takes care of you if you are disowned? Can she come live with us if that happens? I promise you would all like her a great deal, especially you, Mum; she is very smart and responsible.'"

Hermione started to turn. Ron felt sure he could hear the click of her mouth opening and the indrawn breath, and knew very well what her expression and the accompanying tirade would look like.

"I was joking!" Ron hissed pre-emptively. Hermione's expression was about what he'd expected, but at least he'd headed off the accompanying remarks. *Granted, I didn't believe for an instant that Rose would be Sorted anywhere OTHER than Gryffindor... well, maybe Ravenclaw...* "It was a long day, and she was probably in a strop over Fred. She'll be fine." Hermione treated him to a 'this isn't over' expression before turning back to the discussion. Ron most certainly did not breathe a sigh of relief, since he knew he was still in for it. Although now he could amuse himself by imagining the reactions when the Malfoys heard that Scorpius had commenced his school career by inviting a Weasley over.

Harry headed off additional remarks. "There's no question; Scorpius didn't start anything. We have three letters...Al's, Rose's and his...that all substantiate Neville's findings in the matter. Even if we didn't think about it...Scorpius is an only child, raised with about as much contact with the outside world as I had at that age. I happen to be something of an authority on how much your first friend's opinion means under those circumstances... so if anyone got this green and silver ball rolling, it was probably Al," Harry finished with a roll of his eyes. Assorted chuckles, 'Hmmps,' and expressions of exasperated agreement greeted this last bit. Ron was grimly pleased to note that he wasn't the only member of the family who'd pegged Al as slightly mental. *Blimey, mate, what did you expect, sticking the poor sprog with A-S-P for initials?*

"I wonder how much green yarn I have?" Mum sounded resigned. This was bad. If Mum was resigned to the situation, they'd just lost one of their front line fighters.

"So, if we could get back to Fred's troubles..." Harry tried to steer the conversation back to the original subject. Ron wondered why Dad wasn't playing his usual role in that regard. "...we've got to do something. I don't want it to come to the point where we have to step in." His eyes flickered over to Ron, making it clear to everyone just what that meant.

"Now who's being a bully?" The rest of George's face reddened in kind with his hair and nose.

"Fred didn't turn someone into a songbird for a minute; he hit a younger, smaller child with an explosive device. The only reason I'm *nobbliged* to arrest him was that it happened on school property, and Neville gets first crack at discipline." Harry sounded angrier than George, if anything.

"Stop it, George," Angelina interrupted. Ron tried to come up with a way to describe her tone of voice, and the best he could manage was 'brittle.' "Neville's letter was clear. We need to respond to this at home, or else...or else he might have to recommend expulsion."

"That...that's just puffery, to make old Vector happy! He wouldn't do it. Unlikesome people, he still knows how to treat a friend." George glared at Harry.

Ron could see the hurt through the hard set of Harry's features, and finally lost it. "Bloody hell, George! Can't you see we're trying to NOT have to arrest Fred for anything? Why d'you think we're calling a bloody meeting?"

"Ronald, you will not speak like that in my kitchen...even if your brother does refuse to see what we're trying to do for our Freddy," Mum wheezed. "I'll make him see sense, if no one else will!" As soon as her voice rose, she was racked with coughs. Everyone started forward reflexively, but Dad was there first, rubbing her back and helping her get out her potion.

"Molly, love," Dad soothed, "let's see what the other possibilities are, shall we?"

"Yes, Mum, we don't want you to strain yourself." Percy had been right behind Dad, with a cuppa to wash away the taste of the potion that Mum so hated *Bloody Percy*, Ron thought, exasperated. *I almost liked it better when he was ignoring us. The Good Son Show is getting old, here in its second decade!* I understand that Muggles have good results from something called Therapy," Percy said.

"If we could find a Healer at St. Mungo's who is familiar with it, I'd recommend it," Hermione said. "None of us is qualified to do that sort of thing, and he couldn't speak freely to a Muggle therapist." Ron groaned silently. *Don't encourage her, Percy.*

"Let Neville handle things at school but let me take him in hand for the hols," Charlie spoke up for the first time from the Stove-Floo. "He needs an outlet...I'll give him one. There's nothing like nursing an orphaned Swedish Short Snout to use up any amount of excess energy and forget about silly grudges. Come to that, there's nothing like a dragon for putting all the small stuff in perspective," he added jokingly.

"Oh, Charlie! He's too young and small for something so dangerous!" Mum made the predictable objections. Ron was surprised no one had mouthed it along with her. They'd certainly heard that refrain often enough in the past thirty years.

"Smaller is better when it comes to handling dragons. You don't want to look like a serious challenge," Charlie said, with a perfectly straight face. Ron restrained himself from adding anything about presenting a smaller target.

"How is it I'm the only one not seeing all this 'anger'?" George asked.

"Because it comes from you." Angelina spoke. "No, you'll listen to me, if just this once, and not laugh it off. Some days, it's like **ahing** living in the house with us. You smile and say that everything is fine, but you're gritting your teeth as you do, and you go in the workshop and blow things up for an hour. You don't just miss Fred; you're angry he's gone; you're angry it was him instead of you. But you don't tell our Freddy that. All he knows is that you're angry, and he's looking for a reason why."

"Since none of us ever talks about the War," Harry said, and it was his figuring things out voice that Ron knew so well, "except in an unguarded comment here and there, he pieces together what he can. And the only picture he can make with the pieces he's given is that somehow, it's Slytherin's fault that his dad is angry. I know none of us wants to, but... I think we need to talk about it, with the children."

This wasn't good. Harry was using the 'W' word. It was easier to forget when they didn't talk about it, so Ron always told himself. Talking... talking made the storm clouds gather in his mind. It brought back the voices of the dead, made it hard to tell the difference between the dead and the living. It was bad enough that Ron never knew when a sound, or a smell, or a flash of color might bring it all back. It was hard enough to hide it from his family and friends without dredging it up deliberately.

"Molly and Lucy seem to manage just fine," Percy said. He shifted uncomfortably. "We've told them enough."

"I thought so, but now I'm not so sure," Bill said. "Victoire is so independent, she never asks; Louis is so trusting, I don't believe he would think to. I've never been able to figure out what Dominique is thinking. Yet there are times when they'll say something that makes me think they must be talking to someone else. They must be curious. They must be trying to find things out on their own."

"Normally I want the children to do their own research, but in this... I think we've been remiss in leaving out our perspective. After seeing what's happened to Fred, we need to get together and figure out what we're going to tell the children about the war," Hermione said.

Ron flinched. *That word again.* He took deep breaths, slowly so that it wouldn't be noticed. He was good at that.

"I don't want to talk about it, full stop," said George.

"George," Dad said. That was all. His voice was quiet with a bit of a rasp these days, but it somehow cut through the noise all the better. Little by little, everyone went quiet or at least brought their talk down to a murmur. "We're going to have to talk about the war. A good part of your lives were changed by a war that was almost over by the time you were born. Your children are in the same situation, and we aren't protecting them by leaving them ignorant of it. You can't pretend it never happened. You're Fred's dad... not his brother."

And that was really what everyone had been trying to get at, wasn't it? What they were afraid to say, or what they felt but had never managed to put into words. Everyone wanted Fred back, and everyone felt, at least a little, that George had somehow done it. No one had commented...not seriously...when Angelina and George got engaged a week after they'd buried Fred. No one questioned it when Angelina, after the difficult and dangerous pregnancy with Roxy, had quit Quidditch to try for another child. No one pressed when George's 'Everything's fine!' sounded false and fragile, and no one pressed when George laughed off their comments that Fred was too indulged, dressed in too flashy, expensive, grown-up clothes, given the priciest broom model he could handle... all the sorts of things Fred loved to buy with their newly-won wealth.

In a way, they'd all failed, and now it was coming home to roost on little Fred.

Angelina buried her face in her hands and ran from the room. George began to get up, but Dad stopped him again.

"Arthur..." Molly made as if to interrupt.

"She hasn't gone far, dear," he said, just as mildly as before. Sure enough, Ron heard the door to the spare bedroom close. "George, you're going to have to do some thinking. Fred..." Dad stopped and blew his nose. "Our Fred lived his life. It... it wasn't as long as we'd have liked." He stopped again. There was general blinking and blowing of noses. "But you can't live it for him, and you can't ask your son to. He has his own life to live, and right now, he doesn't seem to have a good idea how to go about it."

George sat, stone-faced. It was all too common an expression for him these days. Ginny walked over to George and spoke very low, but Ron still caught most of it. "You and Angelina have to decide... if you have a life together, or... No matter what... you'll have to agree on how to get Fred back on track. You've heard our ideas. We're all here to help you. But it has to be your decision."

A stiff nod was all the response George made. He walked slowly out of the room, and there was a sort of collective sigh of relief when the door to the spare bedroom creaked open again, a murmur was heard, and the door creaked shut on the continuing sounds of conversation.

"Well. I suppose we can all wait a while to see if they come to a decision," Bill said. "Comfortable over there, Charlie?"

"As much as a man can be, lying with his head on a brick," Charlie said cheerfully. "Am I still needed, or are the dragons not an option?"

"I think they're just the thing," Bill said. "Anyone else have an idea?"

"Seconded," Ron replied.

"I'm on board, so long as Charlie throws in some frank discussion of his part in the war," Harry said.

"But we need to decide beforehand what to discuss," Hermione added.

"I still favor therapy," Percy argued. Ron contemplated agreeing, if it would get the talking option off the table.

"We could keep it as an option in reserve, in case things with Charlie don't work out," Harry suggested. "I may have some contacts at St. Mungo's who could help, if it came to that. I'd like to add another thing; since we now have more than one child in Slytherin in this family," and by the hard look on Harry's face, this was a declaration rather

than a suggestion, "we need to show our Gryffindor pride without attacking **their** House."

On and on it went, but Ron stayed well out of it. There was no point so long as George and Angelina weren't in the room.

It was Harry who was hardest to believe. Harry, who kept saying things like, 'It will help us get past all that' and 'I'm glad that Al has such a good friend' and worst of all, 'The Hat wasn't just talking through its...well, you know what I mean...when it asked for unity. Maybe they'll finally make it happen' and all sorts of things that Hermione wanted to hear. It was almost like Harry was bloody married to *her*.

"Charlie." George's voice startled Ron out of his musings and stopped the conversation. No one had noticed when he and Angelina returned. "Does your offer still stand?"

"There's an empty bunk at my place whenever you're ready to send Fred," Charlie promised.

"Right. Well... maybe you could tell him a thing or two about those days. I've still... got to think about it." Ron always felt a little defeated when George trailed off like that, waiting for someone else to supply the end of the sentence.

"I'll talk to him. It will be a start, at least. We'll call you later, Charlie, to work it all out." In her own way, Angelina was filling in the missing words, Ron thought. They were more along the lines of what George couldn't bring himself to say, but it was something. *I hope they can make it work.*

"They might be good for each other yet," Hermione murmured in his ear. Ron managed a small smile. It never got old, when they came to more or less the same thought at the same time. Still... the storm was bad now. It was raining, fire and water, and there was thunder and lightning all at once because there could be no distance between him and the storm; it was lodged solidly in his head. It would be sorted, one way or another.

"Looks like we're almost done here. Hold down our end of the conversation while I visit the loo," Ron said, giving Hermione a quick peck of a kiss in case she decided to try to argue.

He ducked out of the room. He deliberately turned to the living room rather than the toilet. He lit the fire. He tossed in the Floo Powder. He identified himself in his official capacity, and the Floo network responded by shifting the color of the fire from green to blue.

"Auror Code Beta: Hogwarts, Slytherin Common Room."

He would look first, of course, before stepping through; if he'd been unable to follow procedures while the storms returned and raged at their worst, he would never have passed even the perfunctory Auror qualifying procedures to which he and Harry had been subjected. He would hang back in the flames, studying the environment, looking for hazards, before charging in like a rabid erumpent and ripping doors off hinges, if necessary, to get to his child and find out what the sodding hell had happened. He worked himself up to the point where he almost couldn't contain himself enough to follow through on that promise of self-control.

He might not have been able to contain himself except that, when he looked into the Slytherin Common Room, it wasn't empty of students.

The couches and the light were different, and one head was blond and ridiculously shiny instead of a good, honest red; but just the same, it took Ron's breath away. There before him was the image that was so often reflected in the Gryffindor Common Room windows, the waters of the lake, the walls of a greenhouse, the surface of an illicit potion: two small wizards and one small witch, heads close together, eagerly planning some adventure. He watched, barely able to breathe, as Rose's soft curls shook with her disapproval. Silver eyes met green in mirrored expressions of confusion. He predicted the blond's shrug, which made his too-big hoodie slip a little from his shoulders. He knew before the lips quirked exactly what sort of only-between-best-mates-smile his wild-haired nephew would use to answer the shrug.

Something snapped.

Ron tumbled back into the living room. He didn't notice sitting down on the hearth. His head spun from more than the dimensional shift, and everything was floating, past, present, future, all jumbled together, and he was no more substantial than a soap bubble in the midst of it. He knew them; the beautiful, clever girl, the boy with the quick, bright eyes and messy hair, the skinny little boy self-conscious of his hand-me-down clothes and half irritated with, half in awe of the beautiful, clever girl, who wouldn't always be Daddy's *little* girl...

He could see it all, even with his eyes shut tight and his face buried in his arms, which were folded over his knees. Trelawney would be so proud. The storm, the screams, dissolved. The dead did not die again; this time, their voices faded to mere memory. The past receded back to where it belonged.

"Ron? Ron!" He could picture Hermione's expression, every motion of her eyebrows as they transitioned from surprised to worried to something like frantic. He felt her fall to her knees beside him, perhaps not as lightly as when they were young, but her current shape was all the more dear for all they had been through together. His body automatically knew to lean into the familiar feel of her arms and the beloved scent of her shampoo soothed and muted the salt streams that ran from his eyes and nose. It purged all the strange odors from the storm-ravaged landscape. He was still too overcome to explain it all, but for her sake, he would try.

He would try anything for her sake.

"It's over," he whispered. He just knew that when he opened his eyes again, the room would be brighter, clearer. He knew that there wouldn't be any more blank spots.

"What, love?" He could imagine the worry ebbing just a little as her soft brows drew together in her 'figuring things out' expression. She had poked him quite hard once when he'd called them 'kissing caterpillars.' He chuckled at the memory. It was another ray of sunshine breaking through the clouds. He could laugh now and it didn't hurt.

He loved her. He loved the 'caterpillars.' The overwhelming feeling was chasing the last of the darkness, breaking up the remains of the clouds, letting him breathe freely. How long had it been since he'd done that?

"It's over," he said, clearly this time. He looked up at her; he smiled and licked a tear that had run close to the corner of his mouth. It had been years since he'd let himself cry enough to taste...

"What's over?" she asked, sounding more anxious than ever.

He wiped the moisture with his sleeve and spelled the residue away from the cloth before the objection she would surely make. He could do that sort of thing, now. Cry if necessary. Smile. Breathe. Talk about it. It would be a relief, not a burden.

Love every minute of his life with his beautiful wife and their wonderful children, who could really only have at least decent taste in friends.

The rest of the family was trooping toward the living room now, loud as only they knew how to be. Ron beamed at the ruckus, and at Hermione. In his mind was only sunshine and blue sky now. It was brighter, just as he'd thought it would be. He couldn't wait until winter hols, to see all the children...see them properly, with his eyes clear. He hoped that Hugo's room was up to the task of containing four rambunctious boys, for there would certainly be an extra guest over at some point. Would do the stuffy little git some good.

Rose was going to look lovely in green. For her first formal dance, he'd buy her velvet robes; maybe have white roses embroidered on the collar. Silver was too flashy.

"The war," he said.

FIN

Note: The stove-Floo is sheer invention, founded on the premise that one may as well communicate by one vented domestic fire source as another.

