

Small

by InDreams91

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Chapter 1 of 1

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I turned just in time to watch Harry, Ron, and Hermione slip under the invisibility cloak, most likely to escape to some unknown refuge the common room, perhaps. Anger threatened to dictate my expression, but left quickly as my practical nature kicked in. He needed this: a safe place out of reach of the chaos. There would plenty of time later to talk, to rejoice in his triumph, and to try to make sense of the inevitable grief that was certain to overtake us in the loss of it all. So many would never see the magical world restored. I knew they had died with honor, but at that point, it didn't matter. They were gone. There was no waking up no matter how much I tried to convince myself that this was all part of some nightmare.

I turned back to my family and felt a stab of pain in my chest. Percy, hiding his face in Fred's robes, still held him tightly. My father embraced my sobbing mother. I couldn't bear to look at my father's tear-stained face; it felt shameful. I had seen my mother cry before, but I wasn't accustomed to my father losing control like this. I was painfully aware that some privacy was being violated; yet they didn't seem to notice the other people occupying the room. George, his features uncharacteristically harsh, stood awkwardly to the side. It was as if Fred had taken with him the laughter from George's eyes, leaving only bitter shock. My family's reaction to Fred's death startled me much more than Fred dying, probably because in my mind, Fred wasn't dead. He couldn't be.

My conscience kept tugging at me to go comfort them, offer a shoulder, but I couldn't force my feet to move in their direction. It was just too hard. The path of denial looked so much more inviting, freeing me to avoid the unfathomable truth. So I turned my eyes away from Fred's motionless body and surveyed the rest of the room. Anguish filled every section of the hall. There was no escaping death here; the very atmosphere implied a graveyard in the making. Without my full consent, my legs began to walk towards the grounds. A survival instinct emerged: don't stay where you're vulnerable. It's dangerous. I had always been adept in hiding emotions. It had been necessary to avoid mood swings that would have prompted the merciless teasing of six older brothers.

Finally reaching the giant-sized doors that opened to the outside, I glanced back, almost searching for a reason to stay; there was no life back there. I started on my way, wherever that would end up being. The humidness that rushed at me took me by surprise. I guess I expected a cool breeze to accompany the chill of the recent destruction. No such atmosphere surrounded me. Sickly disappointed, I took a deep breath anyway, desperate to clear my head. It remained as foggy as before; the surrealism of Voldemort's downfall and watching my friends die in one night made my head spin.

I was horribly conscious of my physical body: my arms swaying back and forth as I walked, the heaviness of my feet. The crunch of my footsteps echoed in the stillness. Night was usually a quiet time at Hogwarts, but never like this. Unlike the previous tranquilities of nighttime, this sorrowful silence was just another painful reminder of the emptiness of loss. I looked into the sky, expecting I don't know what. Something different? Did I think the stars would somehow be affected by tragedy? The rest of the world wouldn't necessarily know what was going on by now, and countless Muggles were probably fast asleep, unaware of anything life-altering. Irrational and ridiculous as my reasoning was, this thought made me furious. It wasn't fair that they should be blissfully ignorant while we were suffering so much.

I was unaware that the lake was my subconscious destination until I reached it. Not caring in the least about the mud, I slowly lowered myself on to the soggy ground. I was numb, suddenly indifferent to whether or not my clothes were clean, if my feet hurt, or if my appearance was less than flattering. In that moment, I just was, temporarily immune to feeling.

Bored and angry with myself for being unable to process recent events, I racked my brain for memories. Of course, I had spent many sunny afternoons near this spot with Harry during the previous year, back when things were simpler. I remembered Harry telling me that it was like living a part of someone else's life; it wasn't until now that I realized what he really meant. He was free to act like a carefree teenager for once. No memories of dead parents haunted him; he didn't have to lay awake at night worrying about Voldemort finally killing him. He was granted the luxury of not having to think. How rarely those times must have occurred in Harry's life. I immediately felt irritated with myself. Here I was, impatient for his return and upset with his lack of attention to me. It must have just been too much for him to handle.

I still couldn't comprehend that he had finally ended our fear once and for all. So many emotions had taken control of my body: complete horror at the sight of Harry's dead body, and then the immeasurable relief that came in seeing him alive. I was reminded of something I didn't think of often anymore: Harry saving my life in my first year. It wasn't as if I had forgotten. It had just been too much to take in while standing right next to the person who was the reason I was still alive. I had had to compartmentalize to deal with the intensity.

My thoughts settled for a while as I set my sight on the vast water. Its overwhelming nature made me feel small, a feeling I wasn't fond of and usually tried to suppress. Feeling small took away all the control I had over my life. But this time, I had to give in to my insignificance. So many were mourning, and in the midst of it all, that was what I was: small.

Harry's wild adventures throughout the years had made me feel this way more than I cared to admit. He was always so far above, fighting Dementors or competing in tournaments or taking on Voldemort himself. Even when he was leading us in Dumbledore's Army, I had felt so disconnected from him because he had seen things none of us could've imagined. I had a fleeting memory of Fred and George practicing disarming each other and laughing all the while.

Fred.

Sometimes it is hard to understand the reason things suddenly become clear at a particular time. I didn't understand it this time, but something about the image of Fred's smiling face triggered the logical part of my brain to process what had been placed before it, and the truth finally became inescapable: Fred was dead.

I felt both relieved and more terrible than ever as my eyes filled with tears. Fred was gone. We would never talk or laugh or play Exploding Snap again. He wouldn't be able to come home for the holidays or visit us at Hogsmeade. He would never get to see Bill and Fleur have kids or the rest of us get married or see George get rich off of their merchandise or a million other things. He wasn't coming back. I think I had been expecting him to pop up as if playing a cruel trick like the ones he was known for and exclaim, "Just kidding!" before getting a relentless scolding from my mother.

Was known for. The past tense tasted bitter in my mouth as I attempted to speak aloud for the first time since I had left the school. I wasn't entirely successful; the phrase came out more like a squeal as I tried to reel in sobs. The horrible truth overwhelmed me, and my vision changed from blurred to nonexistent. Why did this have to happen to us? Fred and George had always been the ones keeping us laughing in times of tragedy: the ones who had posted *You should be worrying about U-NO-POO* on the front windows of the *Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes*. It seemed entirely too caustic that Fred had been the one to pay for our freedom. This was the epitome of smallness: I couldn't begin to explain the depths of brutality with which this battle had ended.

A warm hand grasped my shoulder. I didn't have to look up to know that it was Harry. I didn't know why, but at that particular moment, he was the only person who could have been there. I tried to control myself as he sat down next to me, apparently oblivious as well to the wetness of the ground. He put his arm around my shoulders, almost hesitantly. I leaned in slightly, lacking the strength to say anything. The numbness had left, and now I just felt weak, exhausted from crying so much.

"It's okay," he said in a strained voice. I could tell he had been crying as well. "It's okay." It may have seemed confusing to others as to what he meant by this: nothing was okay. Everything was wrong and nothing would ever be "okay" again. But the message was clear to me: It's not okay. But it is okay to cry. So I did because somehow, with Harry sitting beside me, I didn't feel quite so small.