

Magnetic Moment

by kalina_blue

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at wikt, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: This story is AU since DH.

Chapter 1

It was the middle of November of Hermione's seventh year at Hogwarts when she was asked to go to the office of Headmistress McGonagall.

Harry, Ron and she had, after a summer-long and fruitless search for Horcruxes, decided to return to school. The plan was to learn as much as they could and then resume their quest prepared and able.

The *Daily Prophet* still reported mysteriously missing witches and wizards or worse, but although the Death Eaters were active and cruel, Voldemort hadn't shown himself in months. The night when Dumbledore died had been the last attack on a grand scale, and it seemed like both sides were biding their time waiting for the other one to strike.

Hermione was glad for the temporary break. Back at Hogwarts it was easy to forget that there was a war going on and that at any moment she and her friends might have to face another lethal battle. She tried to savour the time she had left at Hogwarts, sensing that these would be the last months for her as a relatively carefree youth.

Nevertheless, being called to the Headmistress caused Hermione to worry. Two out of three times a student was ordered to Professor McGonagall's office these days it was to be told that one of their family members had been attacked. Just last week Cormack McLaggan had been called in to receive the news that his aunt and uncle were killed.

So it was with a beating heart and sweaty palms that Hermione Granger reached the stone gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Headmistress's office. "Sherbet Lemon," she whispered the password, which Professor McGonagall had clearly chosen in remembrance of her predecessor.

The entrance opened and Hermione stepped onto the moving staircase. Hermione's nervousness increased as she stood in front of the door. Lifting her right hand she took a deep breath and knocked.

"Enter," came the stern but familiar voice from the other side of the doors. Hermione went inside and looked ahead. Professor McGonagall was sitting at the huge desk that

dominated the office. Hermione came closer.

"Hello, Professor." Her voice sounded strong, not at all a mirror of her feelings.

"Miss Granger, have a seat," Professor McGonagall replied in her customary stern voice.

Hermione did as she was told and looked at the face of her Headmistress intently. Was she going to tell her terrible news? Hermione couldn't read the expression, but couldn't think of another reason why she might have been called to the office either.

"I have a very serious matter to discuss with you, Miss Granger," McGonagall began.

"My parents..." Hermione choked.

"What?" Minerva McGonagall was confused for a second, but when she saw Hermione's crestfallen face she understood. "Good grief, no. They are alright, I'm sure."

Hermione felt herself flooded with relief.

"But there is another matter I have to discuss with you." The professor paused, obviously trying to search for words. Hermione did not speak. "I am afraid..." McGonagall continued after a while, "...the Ministry is causing problems again."

"What kind of problems?"

"Well, ever since the Ministry has proven to be unable to find He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named or even arrest some of the Death Eaters, it is facing resentment from the wizarding population at the moment. We know they repeatedly tried to improve their image by getting Harry to join them, as you are no doubt aware, with little success.

Minister Scrimgeour is in desperate need to find another way to satisfy his voters. As he is unable to put a stop to the threat He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named is posing, he seems to have come to the decision to simply divert the attention of the people to other matters."

"How can he just think that witches and wizards will forget about Voldemort?"

"I don't think he wants them to forget. He just needs something to boost their morale and lift their spirits. And he needs to appear like he is doing something. He needs a diversion panem et circenses."

Professor McGonagall paused once more and cast another worried look at Hermione, who was listening with rapt attention. Then she continued.

"I can only express my disgust with the plan Minister Scrimgeour has come up with. Unfortunately, I do not possess the kind of influence that would be needed to put a stop to this ridiculous law."

"But what is it, Professor? I don't understand."

"The Ministry is about to pass a Marriage Law. Every Muggle-born witch or wizard of age will be paired with a pureblood willing to marry."

"What. How? Why? What," Hermione spluttered incoherently.

"It seems Minister Scrimgeour plans to promote the problem of a rising Squib quota. According to him, the increasing number of Squibs born to all-magical families is a danger to the continuation of the wizarding lines."

"I would think being killed off by Death Eaters is taking a far greater toil on the population," Hermione inserted angrily.

"Of course, but that is not the point. The Squibs are only an excuse. What Minister Scrimgeour wants is for the witches and wizards to be busy. All the upcoming weddings will take their minds off all the funerals they have been attending," McGonagall explained.

"This is preposterous. They can't just force Muggle-borns to get married. We have rights."

"I'm afraid the laws of the wizarding community are quite different from the Muggle ones. If the Ministry passes the law, as I am sure they will eventually, there will be no choice but to abide."

Hermione stared dumbfoundedly at Professor McGonagall and then whispered, her voice almost breaking, "So I'll have to get married?"

"Yes, I'm afraid. And the Ministry will choose who. The exact regulations are still in the works, but it seems like the Ministry is planning to match all the Muggle-borns to those purebloods that petition for marriage."

"That's just unfair. Why do the purebloods get a choice and the Muggle-borns don't?"

"Of course it is unjust! But that is not my main concern. Miss Granger, don't you understand? The Ministry has always been open to the poisonous influence of the Death Eaters now more than ever. Even though the Death Eaters probably did not initiate the Marriage Law themselves, they will no doubt use it to their advantage. Which is why I am particularly concerned about you. Your position as Head Girl and your connections to Mr. Potter make you a prime target."

"You mean... What do you mean?" Hermione asked, once more confused.

"I think it almost certain that the Death Eaters will use their uncontrolled influence within the Ministry to affect your matching. They will make sure you are coupled with an unknown Death Eater, there are still many of them unnamed, and then you will be at his mercy. You are in grave danger."

Hermione paled. The thought of herself being married to a Death Eater made the bile rise in her throat. She didn't want to imagine...

"There seems to be a loophole though," Professor McGonagall continued. "The Order has some influence in the Ministry as well, although it didn't help much in this case."

"What is it?" Hermione asked desperately.

"There is going to be a clause in the Marriage Law, allowing every Muggle-born witch or wizard already in a relationship with a pureblood to marry their partner instead of the one the Ministry chooses for them."

"But I am not in a relationship," Hermione immediately said.

"I am aware. I have given the matter a great deal of thought. There is still some time left. The Ministry hasn't worked out the law completely yet. Especially the choosing process hasn't been determined; therefore, the Order believes that the law won't be passed before Christmas."

"So I have to find a boyfriend before then. Maybe if I tell Ron..."

"Ronald Weasley is not a possible choice. There will be certain requirements a suitor will have to fulfil, the most important one being ability to provide for a family. Mr. Weasley is still at school and has no family fortune to fall back on."

"But then..." Hermione was close to tears by now. Ron had been her only option. But she could not marry a Death Eater. She pictured herself being wed to someone like

Lucius Malfoy and shuddered. She'd rather leave the magical world altogether than share a bed with him or any other Death Eater.

"Since there is no possible option for you at school, I took the liberty of asking one of the Order members to help you. I realise this has been quite a shock for you, but it is essential that we prevent the Ministry from matching you with somebody who will immediately turn you over to He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named himself."

"Who?" Hermione choked out.

"Fred Weasley," Professor McGonagall replied. "I already informed him about the impending Marriage Law and he is willing to marry you."

Hermione did not know what to think. It was all just too much.

"Mr. Weasley is going to arrive shortly. I think it is best if you talk to each other."

Hermione merely nodded.

"I will leave you alone now. I am sure you have a lot to think about. Feel free to use my office for the meeting with Mr. Weasley. He should be arriving through my Floo in a few minutes."

Professor McGonagall exited her office, giving Hermione a short consoling pat on the shoulder on her way out.

Hermione bent forward and rested her elbows on her knees. She felt nauseous. A large part of her refused to believe what Professor McGonagall had just told her. Marriage Law? The whole concept was ridiculous. She desperately hoped that it all was just some sick joke. After all, one of the Weasley twins was involved. Except Hermione knew that Professor McGonagall would never agree to a prank like that. Hell, she even doubted whether the twins would play a prank like that. She could still hope though.

Married to Fred Weasley. Never in a million years had Hermione thought this possible. She rested her face in her hands and closed her eyes. She would not cry.

Hermione stayed like this for a while, focusing on her own breathing and frantically trying to get control over her inner turmoil. She heard the flames in the fireplace flare up and someone stepping out of it. She knew it was Fred but did not lift her head or open her eyes. She couldn't.

Fred Weasley saw Hermione sitting on the chair in front of the huge desk. Her whole body seemed to be sunken in and her shoulders were shaking. She didn't acknowledge his presence when he entered the room through the fireplace, and at first Fred didn't say anything as well. He was nervous.

When it became apparent though that Hermione would not move, he decided it would be upon him to take the first step. Fred cleared his throat.

"Hermione?" he asked tentatively. He desperately hoped she wasn't crying, as he had no idea what to do in that case.

Those worries at least were unfounded because when Hermione finally lifted her head, her cheeks were dry.

"Did McGonagall tell you about the law just now?" he asked her, coming to stand next to the chair she was occupying.

"Yes," Hermione answered. She was surprised that her voice wasn't shaking.

"She told me yesterday," Fred walked around the desk and let himself fall into Professor McGonagall's chair. He put his feet up on the desk. "Wicked, huh? I thought she was joking at first, but then I remembered that ol' McGonagall doesn't have a single humorous bone in her body."

Hermione burst out laughing. Any other time she would have reprimanded Fred for his cheeky words about the Headmistress or his disrespectful treatment of school property, but at this moment she just had to laugh. It was either that or cry.

Fred joined her laughter, and the atmosphere in the office, which had been so tense you could have cut it with a knife, lightened.

"I still can't believe this is happening," Hermione spoke when the laughter had finally died down.

"That makes two of us."

"Why did you agree to... marry me?" Hermione asked. She had been wondering that ever since Professor McGonagall had said Fred's name. She looked at him lounging, there was no other word for it, in his chair, looking like he had no care in the world. His red hair and freckles were familiar, she saw them on Ron and Ginny every day, but his features were different.

Fred didn't look much like his younger brother, his build being much stockier with more muscles and his face bearing little resemblance to Ron's.

"McGonagall said you needed help, so here I am."

"Thanks," Hermione said. What else was she supposed to say? Fred gave her a small smile.

They talked for quite a while after that. Professor McGonagall had given Fred more details than Hermione, so he told her that only very few people in the Order knew about the law yet and even fewer about the loophole.

"I don't think anyone knows though that she asked me to marry you. I haven't even told George."

They also talked about how they would convince everyone that they were a couple. They came up with a plan and discussed the details until late at night.

Finally Fred got up from McGonagall's chair.

"I'll head back now. It's late," he said.

Hermione got up, too.

"I should get back into the dorm as well. Lavender and Parvati will wonder where I am."

"I'll see you after Christmas then," Fred said. They stood in front of each other awkwardly.

"Do you think we should write each other? It will be easier to pull it all off if we know each other better," Hermione asked.

"You're right. I'll owl you tomorrow," Fred agreed. He gave her a brief hug and turned towards the fireplace. He threw the powder in, waited until the flames turned green and then stepped inside. He looked back at Hermione.

"See ya."

"Bye."

Fred was gone and Hermione was left alone in the office. She looked up at the portraits at the wall, which had been sleeping the whole time she had been there. Hermione spotted Dumbledore amongst the other former Headmasters and Headmistresses, and suddenly her throat felt too tight.

She ran out of the room and down the stairs.

During her mad dash towards Gryffindor tower, Hermione didn't once think about being stealthy as to not be caught after curfew. She just ran, trying to put everything that had happened the last couple of hours behind her.

Miraculously, Hermione reached the corridor of the Fat Lady's portrait without attracting the attention of Filch or a teacher. A few feet away from the entrance to Gryffindor tower though, she ran into something solid and fell to the floor. She blinked away the tears that she hadn't even been aware of shedding and stared ahead. There was nothing there. She was about to reach for her wand when she heard Harry's voice.

"Hermione what are you doing here?"

Hermione opened her mouth to answer, but at that moment Mrs. Norris came around the corner. Hermione saw Harry's arm protrude from the Invisibility Cloak as he grabbed her wrist and pulled her to her feet. They crossed the short distance to the Fat Lady, gave her the password ('Devil's Snare') and, ignoring the portrait's scolding about being out of bounds, climbed inside the tower.

The common room was empty that late at night. Harry led Hermione to one of the couches near the fire, taking off his Invisibility Cloak on the way, and they sat down. Hermione was sobbing by now and Harry put a comforting arm around her.

"What happened?" he asked after a while, when she had calmed down some.

Hermione told him everything. She didn't give a damn that McGonagall had advised both her and Fred not to talk to anyone about the matter. She needed someone to talk to. She couldn't do this *alone*.

Harry listened. He was just as angry about the Ministry's incompetence, and when he realised the danger Hermione was in, he threatened to immediately march over to London and tell Scrimgeour exactly what he thought of him, preferably in front of a *Daily Prophet* reporter.

In the end, though, Harry contented himself with something every best friend would have done in this situation. The only thing he could have done. He assured Hermione that he would be with her all the way and that he would help as best as he possibly could. "Just tell me what you need."

The next day Hermione woke up in the common room hoping that everything was just a bad dream. One look into Harry's face told her it was not.

She let herself be dragged down to the Great Hall for breakfast, but was unable to eat anything. Lessons were a relief, as they allowed her to think of something else.

Later that day Hermione was called back to Professor McGonagall's office where she talked the Headmistress through the plan Fred and she had come up with to convince everybody that they were in a relationship. The conversation turned out to be rather awkward, because the Headmistress kept shooting pitiful glances at Hermione.

Hermione, on the other hand, kept telling herself that things could be worse. At least she was being forewarned and didn't have to marry some Death Eater. In the light of his current competition, Fred seemed more than acceptable. That thought became somewhat of a mantra to her.

At first, Professor McGonagall was angry when Hermione told her that she had confided in Harry, but in the end relented that it was good for Hermione and Fred to have at least one ally to help convince people.

Harry surprised Hermione that night by proposing himself. Hermione declined, knowing that, although they weren't in a relationship anymore, Harry still loved Ginny. Hermione assured him that marrying Fred wasn't too bad. She loved Harry for the gesture anyways.

They did not tell Ron. Both Hermione and Harry feared his reaction. The youngest Weasley boy was not known for his rational thinking, and the outburst that was sure to follow the announcement that Hermione was going to marry one of his older brothers threatened to reveal their secret to the whole school. So they kept silent.

Harry thought to himself that it was a good thing. He knew about Ron's deep feelings towards Hermione. He would not take the Marriage Law and its repercussions lightly, and Harry was glad to postpone the inevitable for a bit longer. Hermione and Fred had agreed that nothing could happen before the Christmas holidays, which they would all spend at the Burrow. Hermione was to spend Christmas itself with her parents, but then join the rest at Ottery St. Catchpole.

Fred stayed true to his word, and two days after their meeting in Professor McGonagall's office, Hermione received his first letter during breakfast. He told her about his life, the work for the joke shop and the things he did with George and their friends. Hermione wrote back, telling him about school and how she had told Harry about the Marriage Law.

They exchanged a couple of letters the following month, effectively getting to know each other better. Time passed by fast though, and before Hermione realised what, happened she was leaving Crookshanks in Hagrid's care and boarded the Hogwarts Express to go home for the holidays.

She was about to see her soon to be fiancé again. One thing she knew for sure: her childhood was over.

tbc

a/n: Hopefully, you like the first chapter of my story. Please review.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 of 12

Fred and Hermione set their plan in motion.

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Chapter 2

The others had left only a few minutes ago. Hermione had sat in the Burrow's living room, nose buried deep into a book, though not reading a single word, waiting. Waiting for everyone to go in order to have a hike in the woods surrounding Ottery St. Catchpole.

It was Boxing Day, and she had joined the Weasleys a few hours earlier after spending Christmas with her parents.

The hike had been Harry's idea of a way to get everyone out of the house. So two days ago he had started to tell everyone who would listen how much he liked the snow, and the woods, and the nature surrounding Ottery St. Catchpole and that 'the Dursleys never took me on a family hike.' He neglected to mention that the Dursleys had never gone on a family hike. Dudley point blank refused to walk further than to the fridge and back to his room (though most of the time even that was too far, and he made Aunt Petunia bring him his food instead).

Harry's acting skills weren't exactly great, but it was enough to convince the Weasleys, who had no reason to suspect him of lying and who all knew about his unhappy childhood. Therefore, a hike was planned.

"Are you sure you don't want to come?" Ginny had asked Hermione one final time before leaving while tying her scarf securely around her neck.

"Yes, Ginny, I need to finish reading this book. It's bound to be relevant for our N.E.W.T.s," Hermione had answered, lifting up the book to emphasize her point and to partially hide her face. She was a bad liar. Far worse than Harry.

Ginny had relented and joined Harry, Ron, Charlie, and George outside. Bill had been out with Fleur, and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley were gone on Order business. Molly Weasley had not left without imparting on them the importance of keeping within the wards. As Harry had opted to stay at the Burrow rather than Grimmauld Place for Christmas, the Weasleys' home, including a three mile perimeter, had become severely guarded, and every person coming and going was monitored. The hike was to go in an elaborated circle around the house, 'not stepping one toe out of bounds,' as Mrs. Weasley had repeated several times.

Hermione had listened to the door closing and to the chatter dying away as the members of her surrogate family left the Burrow. When she was sure that they were gone, she threw the book aside but remained sitting on the couch. She was alone.

Except for Fred, of course.

He was somewhere upstairs. As for which reason he had given for not joining the hiking party, she wasn't sure, but not particularly concerned. Fred actually was good at hiding things a necessary ability for a troublemaker and she was sure he had had no problems convincing his siblings of his need to stay behind.

Hermione took a couple of deep breaths, exhaling slowly, trying to summon some of the courage that a Gryffindor such as herself supposedly possessed. It didn't seem to come. Maybe she should have been sorted into Hufflepuff. She was in the middle of deliberating whether it would be any use to wave her wand and scream, "*Accio* courage!" when Fred came pounding down the stairs.

"Are they finally gone?" he asked.

Hermione only nodded as the lump in her throat was rendering her speechless.

"You nervous?" Fred asked, coming to stand in front of the couch and gazing down at her with a concerned face.

"Which would be understandable, you know," he continued when it became apparent that Hermione was going to stay mute. "After all, you are about to embark on an adventure many witches would kill to experience. I don't want to have to scare you, but I should probably inform you that there is a line a long one to..."

Hermione's laughter interrupted his monolog, and Fred was relieved to see her finally getting up from the couch.

"It's good to know you are staying modest despite all the attention."

"One does his best."

They laughed together. But eventually the laughter died down again, and they stood in front of each other, uncertain about the next step.

"How long did Harry say he would keep them away?" Fred asked.

"Not sure. He said he would fake an injury about half an hour into the hike."

"We should probably go upstairs then and get set up."

Hermione nodded her head, her nervousness returning full force. She followed Fred upstairs into the twins' old room. Fred and George had, after a lot of badgering from their mother, agreed to stay at the Burrow during the Holidays. Charlie, Bill and Fleur stayed too, since Molly was adamant to have her family around in such dangerous times, and nobody had wanted her to be unnecessarily worried on Christmas. Only Percy stayed away, still avoiding his family.

The boxes that had been in the room the summer before Harry, Ron and Hermione's sixth year were still prominent in the room. Also, there were two bags lying around, clearly containing the twins' overnight things and their changes of clothes, since half of the contents were thrown about the room.

"George was looking for his gloves," Fred said by way of explaining once he noticed Hermione surveying the mess. He waved his wand and everything piled up onto one of the unmade beds.

"I take it that's George's bed then," Hermione said, grinning.

"Yup. He always was the messier one of the two of us."

"I'm sure."

Again they stood in front of each other. Nervous.

Fred looked down on his watch and announced that the others had been gone for half an hour. They needed to get a move on. Hermione contemplated the Summoning Charm for her courage again. In the end, however, she decided that what she was about to do was not a matter of bravery. She simply had no choice. Not really. Between a Death Eater and Fred she would certainly chose the troublemaking prankster. And if a make-out session with Fred was the way to keep her safe from a marriage with one of Voldemort's cruel followers, then she would do that.

For that was their plan: Hermione and Fred would make out and the others would, led by Harry, come upon them. Surely nobody would believe that Hermione would get involved with anyone lightly, let alone with someone like Fred, who wasn't exactly known to keep steady girlfriends. After finding them, the others had to believe that Hermione and Fred had liked each other for some time already.

Taking one final breath, Hermione looked up to Fred.

"So, what do you think we should do?"

Fred cleared his throat before answering. "We should probably take off our clothes... partially I mean. It has to look real." Hermione blushed but nodded.

So Fred took off his sweater and the t-shirt he was wearing, and tossed them aside. Hermione slowly unbuttoned the blue cardigan she wore and let it drop to the floor. The tank top she wore underneath followed, leaving her in a black bra and pants. She looked back up at Fred, her nervousness having reached a new high. Standing this close to a half naked Fred and her mind on the things they were about to do, she felt like all the oxygen had left the room, leaving her breathless.

Fred had to swallow. He could honestly say that up until very recently he had never seen Hermione Granger as anything else but his younger brother's brainy friend. It just never occurred to him to see her as a girl. A quite attractive girl.

When he had discovered that Hermione would be the one he would spend the rest of his life with, he had been too preoccupied to think about his family's reaction and the steps they would have to take to ensure that their little scam would be convincing and remain undetected. Therefore, he had never even gotten around to think about how being intimate with Hermione would be like.

Now that she was standing in front of him wearing only a bra, her chest heaving as her breath slightly quickened, Fred's mind was assaulted by a bunch of images featuring him and Hermione quite close. Why hadn't he thought about her that way before? And when did Ron's bookworm of a friend grow up to look like this?

Deciding that he would think about that later, Fred took a step towards her. He tried to think of something to say that would make them both relax and feel more at ease, but his mind was blank. He absently took another look at his watch and realised that Harry and his siblings had been gone for almost 45 minutes now. They would be back soon. Fred loosened his watch and tossed it onto the pile of clothes on the floor.

If words fail you, let your actions speak for you. With that thought in mind, Fred closed the remaining space to a waiting Hermione. His right hand lightly touched her face underneath her chin and gently dipped her head upwards. For a brief moment they looked into each other's eyes, and he gave her a small, reassuring smile. Then Fred's gaze wandered lower to Hermione's lips. He bent down towards her and brushed her lips with his. His eyes fell shut.

Slowly the kiss became more demanding, and Fred's tongue came out to seek entrance to Hermione's mouth. She met him halfway, and the kiss turned heated. Hermione brought her hands up to rest on his shoulders, and Fred let his hands roam along her uncovered back.

Taking a few steps forward, Fred pushed Hermione towards the second bed, the one where he hadn't dumped all the junk on. His bed.

As her legs hit the frame, her knees gave in, and Hermione let herself glide down on the mattress. Never breaking their kiss, Fred followed, coming to lie on top of her. He pushed one of his legs between hers, parting them slightly. Supporting his weight on one arm, the other was free to skim along Hermione's body. When he grazed the side of her breasts through the thin material of her bra, Hermione moaned into his mouth.

Hermione felt on fire. The nervous lump in her throat had been swapped with a swarm of fluttering butterflies in her stomach, and her heart was beating unbelievably fast. She let her own hands wander around Fred's back, feeling the muscles twitch.

Only when the need to breathe became too strong to resist did they break the kiss. For a few seconds they looked into each other's eyes again, both too surprised by the passion between them to utter a single word. Then Fred dipped his head to trail a path of wet open mouthed kisses along Hermione's neck towards her collarbone, and Hermione let her eyes fall shut to enjoy the sensation.

All rational thought had left Fred as he sucked at Hermione's neck. All he could feel was her body writhing beneath his and her foot that skimmed around his calf. All he could hear were the soft moans he wasn't even sure she was aware of making. When one of her hands travelled lower on his back and she let her fingers wander underneath the waistband of his jeans albeit just a mere inch he let out a moan himself.

His mouth came up to meet Hermione's, engaging her in another heated kiss as his right hand massaged her breast. Hermione arched herself into him and her own hand was retrieved from underneath Fred's jeans to cup his left buttock, mimicking his treatment of her right breast.

Fred broke their kiss in favour of licking Hermione's ear. She tilted her head to the side to give him more access, all the while encouraging him with her soft moans. Her hand found the back pocket of his jeans, diving in, pushing him towards her.

Fred ground his growing erection into Hermione and groaned. Leaning in for their third kiss, his previously absent mind came to a startling realisation: he wanted Hermione, and he was about to lose what little control he had left.

Five minutes into the hike, Harry had come to the conclusion that he didn't like hiking that much after all. Especially since it was snowing and he was decidedly cold. The Weasleys accompanying him seemed to enjoy it though. They were engaged in an apparently quite funny conversation about Hogwarts and all the pranks that had been played there (mostly courtesy of Fred and George, though the rest of the siblings were no saints either).

But Harry wasn't able to concentrate on them much, his mind being back at the Burrow with Hermione and Fred. Hermione was like a little sister to him (though technically she was older and would in all likelihood resent being called *little*). Nevertheless, Harry didn't like the thought of Hermione making out with anyone. Especially under these circumstances. But be that as it may, he had been unable to come up with a better plan, and he quite agreed with Fred when he said that no one would just believe them if they went and said, "Oops, have we forgotten to mention that we are completely smitten with each other?"

This plan, if it succeeded, was most likely to convince everyone and had the added bonus of giving a few extra months to their established and hopefully soon to be Ministry approved relationship. For Hermione and Fred planned to say that they had been with each other since late last summer when Hermione came to stay with Harry and the Weasleys at Headquarters.

The reason for keeping their relationship a secret was easily explained. They didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, which in essence meant Ron's. Harry gritted his teeth when he thought about his best friend and the blow he was about to receive. Harry knew that even though his two best friends had decided against pursuing a relationship in light of the war and the danger they were all in, Ron's feelings towards Hermione hadn't changed. He simply loved her, and seeing her with one of his brothers was going to break his heart.

Harry desperately wished he could at least explain the circumstances to Ron, though he doubted it would make much of a difference to Ron's feelings. But Headmistress McGonagall had insisted he refrain. The more people who knew, the bigger was the danger of someone discovering that Hermione and Fred's relationship wasn't real. Additionally, the credibility of the couple depended on Ron's reaction the most. As cruel as it sounded, Ron's hurt feelings, which Harry was sure would be clearly visible for anyone, were instrumental for the convincing of those people who would not be present to see Fred and Hermione's impromptu make-out session. After all, which pupil at Hogwarts would neglect to believe Hermione was with Fred, if Ron was heartbroken?

Hermione's safety came with a heavy price: Ron's happiness.

With these less than happy thoughts, Harry kept on trudging next to the others, gnashing his teeth in frustration pretending to laugh along with them when the tale of a particularly funny prank was told and every so often checking his watch to see whether the half hour was up yet.

When he confirmed that enough time had passed, Harry directed his gaze towards the ground they were walking on. He had early on discarded the idea of faking an injury, certain that he could not fool the people that knew him the best. So his only option was getting injured, only slightly of course, for real.

The opportunity presented itself in form of a root sticking out of the snow covered ground. Making sure that no one was looking, Harry nonverbally cast a spell when he

walked by, injuring his own foot and simultaneously letting himself fall to the ground.

"Harry, are you okay?" Ron asked, bending down and trying to help his friend up. The others had stopped as well and came to stand around Harry, looking worried.

"I just tripped over this stupid root," Harry explained, trying to stand up but unable to put any weight on his injured foot. He grimaced as the pain shot up his leg, feeling quite unenthusiastic about his obviously efficient spell work. *Damn, it hurt.*

Charlie took off Harry's shoe, inadvertently adding to the pain, to examine the injury.

"It doesn't look broken, but I'm no Healer," he announced. "We better get you back to the Burrow."

"Sorry, guys," Harry apologized, doing his best to appear sorry about having spoiled the hike.

"Don't be daft," Ron replied, taking one of Harry's arms around his shoulder. Charlie took the other and together they helped Harry back to the Burrow. George offered to use 'Wingardium Leviosa' to get Harry back more efficiently, but Harry hastily declined. For one, he wanted to make sure they didn't arrive at the Burrow before Hermione and Fred were ready, and secondly, he really wasn't stupid enough to agree to let one of the infamous Weasley twins levitate him around. He would probably end up doing loops and pirouettes in the air all the way back to the Burrow.

A little over an hour after their departure, the hiking party arrived back home. Harry was put down on the sofa where Hermione's abandoned book still lay, although nobody took notice. Ginny helped Harry out of his coat, and George put Harry's injured foot up on some cushions.

"Guys, it's probably just strained," Harry protested, but to no avail. His insides were churning violently at the thought of what was about to happen, giving his face a quite sickly pallor. The Weasleys attributed this to his injury and were convinced he was in a great deal of pain.

"I have some cooling potion upstairs for Quidditch injuries," Ron announced. "That should help against the pain."

Harry desperately wanted to keep his friend from going upstairs, but he kept his mouth shut. He had to.

Ron, oblivious to Harry's concern, ran upstairs to get the potions. He got to his room, grabbed the tube with Conrad's Cooling Crème and turned around. However, on his way down he became aware of the sounds coming out of the twins' bedroom. Moaning. There was undeniably someone moaning in there.

Ron went closer to the door. Then he heard a second person, definitely female, and moaning just as passionately as his brother.

For a few seconds Ron grinned the way a boy would grin when finding out another one got lucky. Then he realised that currently there were only two females at the Burrow. And one of them was their sister. Ron stopped grinning.

Dropping Conrad's Cooling Crème to the floor, Ron's hand grabbed the handle of the door to Fred and George's room and hurled the door open. He was greeted by the sight of his half-naked older brother atop of his best friend and long time love interest, who was in an equal state of undress. Their hands were all over each other as they kissed passionately.

Ron let out an anguished scream.

tbc

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 of 12

The Weasleys' reactions to finding Fred and Hermione together.

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at wikt, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: This story is AU since DH.

Chapter 3

Fred and Hermione actually hadn't realised the others had come back, so consumed were they by the unexpected heat between them. They didn't even hear Ron opening the door. Nevertheless, they certainly heard him scream.

Immediately, they froze, but before either of them could react any further, Ron had violently grabbed Fred's shoulders and pulled him off the bed.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Ron screamed. However, he didn't wait for a reply before slamming his fist into his brother's face.

Fred stared at his younger brother dumbfoundedly. As Ron moved to hit Fred a second time, Fred instinctively raised his fists and defended himself. Soon the two brothers were locked in a fierce fight.

Now Hermione screamed too.

Ginny, George and Charlie came running into the room. They were shocked to see Fred and Ron beating each other.

"What happened?" Ginny asked, but nobody answered.

George and Charlie immediately went to try and separate their brothers, which proved to be quite difficult. In the end, it took Hermione and Ginny's help, too. They were holding back Fred as George and Charlie forcefully restrained Ron.

At that moment, Harry, who had had some trouble with the stairs, came hobbling into the room.

"What's going on?" he asked, though he had a pretty good idea already.

"Ask him," Ron screamed, still straining against the grip of his brothers. "Ask that bastard what he was doing with Hermione!"

"Look, Ron..." Fred started.

Ron didn't let him finish and screamed further insults at his brother.

There was no need for an explanation anyway, as Fred and Hermione's state of undress, their swollen lips and the bite mark on Hermione's neck spoke volumes. The rest of the Weasleys seemed to be at a loss for words. Fred had stopped struggling though, and the girls released his arms.

"Look, Ron, try to calm down," Harry tried to reason with his friend, but Ron wouldn't listen. He kept trying to break free from Charlie and George, hell bent, it seemed, on killing Fred.

"You bastard, I'll..."

In the end, Charlie and George, with the help of Harry, who had completely forgotten his sprained ankle, dragged Ron out of the room. Being the last to go through the door, George sent an accusing look towards his twin before disappearing. Ginny went after them, not speaking a word, not even looking at the couple, picking up the discarded cooling crème for Harry on her way out.

That left Fred standing in the middle of the room, sporting a black eye, a bleeding nose and several bruises on his upper body. Next to him was Hermione, white as a sheet and shaking.

They stood there for a while, listening to the others dragging Ron downstairs. Ron's cussing could be heard all the way down. Finally, they heard a door close, and they were unable to hear the others any longer.

Fred sighed and let himself fall onto his bed. Hermione quietly started to pick up her clothes and got dressed.

"My brother certainly took it well," Fred remarked, the sarcasm heavy in his voice.

"Did you really have to fight him though?" Hermione asked quietly.

"What did you expect me to do?" Fred sat back up and looked at Hermione. "Just let him beat me to a bloody pulp?"

"You could have..."

"What, Hermione?" Fred asked forcefully. "What could I have done?" He sounded angry now.

Hermione hung her head and fisted her hands into her hair. The room was silent for a while.

"Let's not fight about this. What's done is done," Fred finally said.

Hermione took a deep breath and looked up again. Fred dragged one palm over his broken nose, smearing the blood that had accumulated there. He winced. Taking out her wand, Hermione sat down next to Fred and started to heal his wounds.

George, Charlie, Ginny and Harry had dragged Ron all the way to the kitchen. Though he seemed to be calming down a bit, he had kept up a steady stream of insults the whole time. It did not take much to see how deeply shaken he had been by seeing Hermione with Fred. In the kitchen, Ron let himself fall on a chair and rested his forehead on the table. He finally stopped swearing.

"I don't believe this." Ginny sat down next to Ron and patted his back consolingly. "Did anyone know about this?" She looked up expectantly at George and Harry. The two guys shook their heads.

"I can't believe Fred didn't tell me." George sat down heavily. He seemed less shocked by the fact that Hermione and Fred had been caught in bed together than by the fact that he hadn't known about it. "We tell each other everything."

"Maybe it's the first time something has happened between them." Charlie, who had stood by the door until then, moved to sit at the table as well.

"No way," Ginny immediately said. "There is no way Hermione would just jump into bed with a guy without being seriously involved."

"It's not like they were having sex," George inserted. "I mean they were still half dressed."

"You didn't see them," Ron said angrily, raising his head from the table. "They were all over each other when I came into the room. They didn't even hear me enter at first. How could they do this?"

Harry hadn't said a single word since he had entered the kitchen. He feared that he would give himself away if he were to speak. He pitied Ron; it was obvious that he was heartbroken. Harry shifted uncomfortably, feeling guilty because he had known about Fred and Hermione's plan.

Charlie took out his wand and healed Ron's injuries from the fight with Fred. Ron didn't seem to notice. He kept staring at the surface of the table in front of him, his expression a mixture of utter disbelief, anger and hurt. In any case, his physical injuries weren't nearly as bad as Fred's. No one had noticed, of course, given the uproar in the bedroom, but Fred had mostly refrained from attacking his younger brother and restricted his hits to defend himself only.

Seeing Ron's injuries fade reminded Harry forcefully about his own injured foot. He was presently standing up, leaning against the sink, keeping a bit of distance from the Weasleys sitting around the kitchen table. All his weight rested on his left and uninjured foot. Adrenalin had kept him going so far, but by now Harry was feeling the effects of dragging Ron downstairs while walking with a hurt foot. Once again Harry was not in the mood to delight in the excellent results of his own spell. He resolved to seriously work on his acting abilities so as to avoid having to injure himself ever again in order to pretend to be hurt.

The pain increased by the second, and Harry finally relented and sat down at the table with the others. Ginny noticed his discomfort and silently handed him the cooling crème. Harry rubbed it on his foot and felt instantly relieved even though the pain didn't leave completely.

While he tended to his foot, Charlie and Ginny continued to comfort Ron. George stared pensively into the air.

"I wonder for how long this has been going on," he questioned.

As if it were possible, Ron blanched even more, and Ginny shot George an angry look.

"Shut the hell up."

The kitchen fell silent again.

Up in the bedroom, Hermione had finished healing Fred's wounds, and he had put his clothes back on as well.

"What do you think we should do now?" she asked him.

Fred shrugged his shoulders. Their actions after being caught making out had depended on the reaction of the others. Therefore, it hadn't made much sense to plan further ahead. They would have to improvise from now on.

"Should we go down and try and talk to them?"

"I guess," Fred said reluctantly. "We can't hide in my bedroom forever."

Together they left the room and walked down the stairs. At the bottom, Hermione halted Fred. She was chewing on her bottom lip and looking rather anxious.

"Do you think we should hold hands or something?" she asked Fred in a low voice so nobody could accidentally overhear. "They have to believe we're a couple."

"That might not be the best idea. Ron's probably still pissed and we shouldn't upset him any further."

Hermione nodded and they kept walking. Checking the living room and finding it empty, the pair went into the kitchen.

Everybody in the kitchen looked up as they entered. Ron made to get up from his chair, but was pushed back down by Charlie's firm hand on his shoulder.

"Hi," Hermione tried, having no idea what else to say.

"Hi? That's all you have to say? How about you start explaining what happened up there," Ginny spat, gesturing roughly in the direction of the twins' bedroom.

The hostile attitude of the girl, whom Hermione had for a long time now considered a very good friend, temporarily blocked her ability to speak. Luckily, Fred was more composed than Hermione.

"Look, guys, we're sorry. We know we should have told you earlier. But..."

"So you are a couple?" Ron interrupted.

"Yes," Fred admitted, and Hermione nodded her head.

"Since when?" Ron asked in an eerily calm voice.

"Since this summer, when we stayed at Grimmauld Place, but..."

Ron interrupted his brother once more. Looking directly at Hermione, he stated, "So you tell me at Bill's wedding that it would be better not to be together because of everything that is going on, and three weeks later you get together with my brother."

"I thought we both agreed that we shouldn't be together," Hermione said, not looking at Ron or Fred, but staring at her shoes instead.

"Yeah, I agreed with you. Because I knew you didn't want to be in a relationship while we're fighting against Voldemort," Ron spat. "Did I miss his defeat then? Because you obviously feel you are able to have a relationship *now*."

Ron shrugged off Charlie's hand, which still rested on his shoulders, and left the kitchen through the backdoor. Charlie got up and followed him. Harry hesitated for a moment, unsure what to do. But remembering that he had agreed with Hermione that whatever happened he would not speak immediately on her behalf so he would not look suspicious, he decided that there was nothing gained from him staying. He went after Ron, determined to at least try and help one of his best friends.

Harry had barely left the kitchen when Ginny rounded on Hermione and Fred.

"I can't believe the two of you. I never thought you would be so selfish and hurt Ron just so you can have a romp in the sheets. And let Ron catch you? Can you get any stupider?"

"What is this all about?" Mrs. Weasley's voice could be heard from the backdoor that Harry had left open. She entered the kitchen, followed by her husband. "What are you fighting about, and why are you lot back so early? I thought you wanted to go hiking?"

Both Weasley twins were shaking their heads and gesticulating to their sister to be quiet. This should stay among them. But Ginny was far too angry on her brother's behalf (and if she were honest, on her own behalf as well; after all, Harry had broken up with her for very similar reasons as Hermione had with Ron).

"We had to come home because Harry had tripped. We found those two," Ginny pointed towards Fred and Hermione, a nasty look on her face, "... in bed together."

"What?" Mrs. Weasley thundered.

"Fred, is this true?" Arthur Weasley asked his son, alarmed.

Fred had no choice but to nod.

"George, Ginny, leave the kitchen," Mrs. Weasley ordered. George immediately got up, pulling his still angry sister behind him. Once again he shot a look at his twin before he left through the door. This time it was sympathetic.

"This is appalling. Such inexcusable and irresponsible behaviour. I am ashamed of both of you," Mrs. Weasley shouted. She looked at her son.

"I expected more of you, Fred. You were raised better than that." Fred was grinding his teeth and refused to look at his mother.

"We're old enough to make our own decisions," he told his parents.

"Not as long as you are staying under our roof," his mother screamed back at him. Fred did not answer.

Hermione looked at Fred and noticed how his fists were clenched at his sides. He obviously was controlling himself only with difficulty.

"And Hermione, I am very much disappointed in you, too," Mrs. Weasley started on Hermione when her own son stopped arguing. "I was willing to believe that article three years ago was entirely made up by Rita Skeeter, but now I have to assume that there was obviously some truth to it!"

"Mum!" Fred looked at his mother in shock. Obviously he couldn't believe that his mother had just said that. Hermione recoiled from Mrs. Weasley's words like they had physically harmed her. She stood shaking with her back pressed tightly against the kitchen wall.

"Molly, I think that's enough," Arthur Weasley said calmly. To Hermione and Fred he said, "You have to understand that there are certain rules in this house, and as long as you stay here, you are expected to follow them. I know both of you are of age, and we can't control what you do outside this house; though I certainly expected more of you two. You should have at least some regard for the feelings of the people around you."

Mr. Weasley looked at his son and Hermione, disappointment evident in his features.

"Now, I think, we have to ensure that something like this doesn't happen again. You will have to promise..."

"Don't worry about it. I'll be going back to my parents," Hermione interrupted his lecture. She felt sick to her stomach and desperately wished to get out of this house. Without even looking at Fred, Hermione turned and left the kitchen hurriedly.

She could not believe the Weasleys' reactions. Hermione had known that Ron would get hurt by her behaviour, and even though there was nothing she could have possibly done about it, Hermione despised herself for harming him.

However, she had not counted on the hostile behaviour of the other Weasleys. With tears streaming down her face, she ran upstairs. She hurried inside Ginny's room and slammed the door shut behind her. Luckily, her trunk was still mostly packed; after all, she had only arrived at the Burrow a few hours ago. Hermione threw the few odd items that she had taken out back into the trunk. The tears were running freely down her face.

A knock at the door made her freeze in mid-movement. Hermione was sure that she could not stand another argument. She stayed silent, hoping that whoever it was would just go away.

"Hermione, it's me," Fred's voice could be heard through the thin wood of the door. "Can I come in?"

Hermione went to open the door and Fred slipped inside quickly. It seemed like he wanted to escape the rest of the house, too.

"Are you alright?" he asked her, noticing her tears immediately.

Hermione nodded her head, though it was glaringly obvious that the opposite was the case.

"I never thought they would react like this." Fred's voice clearly betrayed his shock.

"Me neither."

"Are you going to be okay back at your parents'?"

"Yeah, it definitely beats staying here."

"I know what you mean. I'll be going back to the shop once you're gone."

Hermione had finished packing while they were talking and closed her trunk. They looked at each other for a while, both of them unsure what to do. Fred dragged a hand over his face, his expression unreadable. Hermione was forcefully reminded that she didn't know him that well after all. No matter what they had done in his bedroom and despite the letters they had written to each other during the last months, she still barely knew Fred. And now they were somewhat connected, allies in this insane scheme. Hermione very much hated the Ministry and its stupid laws at that moment.

Fred sighed and offered to take her trunk. Hermione accepted and, taking a deep breath, followed him out of the room.

They made it down the stairs and through the living-room without meeting anyone. Hermione suspected that Harry had convinced the others to leave them alone for now. Once more, she felt gratitude towards her best friend.

At the front door, they ran out of luck. Mrs. Weasley was waiting for them.

"I'll be writing to your parents about this."

"If you must," Hermione answered curtly and with a stony face. The initial hurt was blotted out by anger. She wanted to get out of this house and didn't care what she had to say in order to achieve it.

Mrs. Weasley seemed even more aggravated by her tone of voice and opened her mouth, no doubt, to give her another lecture.

"Leave it be, Mum," Fred said, his voice strained. He walked around his mother, still carrying Hermione's trunk, and left his childhood home. Hermione followed quickly, not sparing Mrs. Weasley another glance.

They walked next to each other at a brisk pace. The three-mile Anti-Apparition radius prevented Hermione from Apparating directly, and she had been unable to use the Floo because, naturally, the Grangers weren't connected.

Hermione didn't know for how long they had walked, but when they reached the outskirts of Ottery St. Catchpole, she could feel a faint tingling when they stepped outside the reach of the wards. She stopped and looked up at Fred, who had ceased walking as well.

"You should be okay to Apparate here." He gave the trunk to her.

"Okay."

She was about to leave when Fred asked, "Why didn't you tell me that it was you who broke up with Ron? I thought the decision was mutual."

"Would it have made a difference?"

"I guess not."

Fred looked at her with a sombre expression on his face. All of a sudden Hermione thought how rare it was not to see him at least smiling. She felt guilty. It was because of her that Fred wasn't laughing.

Not knowing what else to say, Hermione took out her wand.

"Bye then."

"Bye."

Hermione vanished and instantly reappeared in a quiet corner of the street where her parents lived. She took her trunk and dragged it behind herself. A few short minutes later, she stood before the front door and rang the bell.

Her mother opened the door and was quite surprised to see her daughter so soon after her departure.

"Hermione, what happened? I thought you were going to stay with the Weasleys."

"Nothing, mother."

"I'm sure it isn't *nothing*. We didn't expect you back until the summer."

"Can we please talk about it tomorrow? I'm tired."

Hermione walked around her perplexed mother and inside the house. She saw her father in the living-room, but did not stop to say hello. The emotional rollercoaster ride

that had been this day had left Hermione drained, and she was positive that she couldn't possibly relive the day for her parents. Not when everything still was so fresh in her mind.

Not caring about the muscles in her arms that strained underneath the heavy weight, Hermione lifted up her trunk and walked up the stairs as quickly as possible. Once in her room, she locked herself in. Shrugging off her clothes, she got underneath the covers of her bed. With her head buried underneath the sheets, Hermione allowed herself to cry again. It took hours until the tears finally subsided, and she fell into a fitful slumber.

tbc

a/n: Hopefully, you guys like my story so far. Please be so kind and review. Happy Easter!

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 of 12

The Grangers receive an owl from Molly Weasley.

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at wikt, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: This story is AU since DH.

Chapter 4

After a night full of tossing and turning in her bed, Hermione woke up late and felt more tired than before she had gone to bed. She gathered the sheets around herself and moved to sit down on the big windowsill. The window in her room faced the front of the house, and Hermione could watch the better part of the street; something she had done for hours when she was little.

Leaning her hot cheek against the cool glass, just like she had done as a young girl, she watched the street below. Everything was covered in a white layer of snow, and the icicles on the roofs sparkled in the late morning's sunshine. Hermione watched the postman walking past their neighbours' beautiful birdhouse as he delivered the mail. A car drove down the road leaving behind tire trails in the snow, and a few children were building a snowman. The street looked like a picturesque Christmas card come to life.

Hermione sighed. Years ago she would have been one of the children building that snowman. Back before she had found out she was a witch.

She closed her eyes and marvelled at the coolness emanating from the window. No, Hermione did not regret going to Hogwarts. Sometimes, however, she wanted to be that carefree, bushy-haired, little girl again, who ran around in the snow with her friends and then came home to her loving parents to warm up with a cup of hot cocoa.

Alas, Hermione's life wasn't that simple anymore. Instead, it was complicated and difficult. Hermione sighed again. She had spent hours the other night thinking about the day she had had. Nothing had gone as planned. Well, maybe it had. Everybody believed her and Fred to be a couple, that much was for sure.

They *had* been rather convincing. Hermione's cheeks still coloured every time she thought back to those minutes in Fred's bedroom before Ron had discovered them. No matter how hard she tried to assure herself that it had all been an act, she could not forget how very real it had felt to be with Fred.

Hermione only left her room when she was sure her parents were gone. They always opened their dental practice between Christmas and New Year as each year there were a surprising number of people who broke out a tooth on the turkey or who simply ate too many sweets and got a toothache because of it.

Her mother had left a note, though, telling Hermione that they were going to be back in the evening and that they would ~~talk~~ then. Of course, she would want an explanation for her daughter's unexpected visit. Hermione was not looking forward to that conversation at all. After fixing herself an early lunch, she went back to her room and got a few of her books out. Studying usually helped to divert her mind from unpleasant thoughts (or the pleasant ones she should not be thinking about).

It was late in the evening when the Grangers finally returned to their home. There had been a vast number of emergencies, which had them occupied until well after dinnertime. Additionally, there had been a commotion during the early afternoon when their elderly receptionist, Marybeth Catherwood, got scared by an owl colliding with a closed window. Mr. Granger had immediately convinced the flustered woman (she was a self-proclaimed animal lover and worried about that "poor birdie getting hurt") to take a coffee-break with him, in order to recover from the shock, while Mrs. Granger opened the window apprehensively.

She was confirmed in her suspicion that they were dealing with a case of owl post when the old and greying Errol heaved himself into the room. Tied to his foot was a piece of parchment, which Mrs. Granger unfastened with unsteady hands. She had never quite gotten used to the *other* way of delivering the mail.

Once freed of his charge, Errol took off again. The elderly owl courageously threw itself out of the window and, dipping several feet (the practice was on the sixth floor) before catching a wind, flew home with slow but more or less steady flaps of its wings.

Mrs. Granger waited for her husband to return. It did not take long until he came back into the room, telling her how Mrs. Catherwood was currently busy entertaining everyone in the waiting room with an elaborate narrative about the "shocking incident." Together, they opened the letter. It was from Mrs. Weasley and the content was of such nature that Mr. Granger wanted to drive home immediately in order to demand an explanation from his daughter. Mrs. Granger, however, convinced him to finish dealing with their patients first.

In retrospect, making Mr. Granger stay might not have been the best idea. He was, understandably, in a bad mood, and each patient entering the examination room recoiled from the dark look on his face. Nobody liked a dentist who looked as if he would delight in causing the next person to cross his path considerable amounts of pain. Although, on a positive note, all the patients who left the chair swore, with painfully contorted faces, they would take better care of their teeth from now on.

By the time the last patient finally left the practice on shaky legs, Mr. Granger's temper had reached boiling point. He and his wife hurried home to talk to their daughter.

Hermione had spent the day in solitude. She had made a valiant effort to get some studying done, but had failed miserably. When she wasn't thinking about the Weasleys and their hurtful comments regarding her recent conduct, Hermione was reliving the cause for said anger (in detail). All in all, it hadn't been a very productive day, and

Hermione awaited the arrival of her parents with trepidation.

The moment Mr. Granger stormed into the house, a piece of parchment clutched tightly in his right hand, Hermione knew Mrs. Weasley had followed through on her promise and written to her parents. She steelled herself for the confrontation.

"Young lady, explain this to me," her father demanded, brandishing the letter almost like a sword and not even bothering with a 'hello.'

Hermione shot a quick glance over her father's shoulders to see her mother enter the room after him. Though she didn't look as angry as her husband, Hermione noticed how her mother pressed her lips tightly together and knew that she couldn't expect any support from her.

"Dad, it isn't what you think."

"I certainly hope so! Because you better not have been caught in bed with a boy."

"Er..." Hermione stumbled for words. She didn't want to lie to her parents.

"Hermione!" her mother exclaimed. "Did you sleep with that boy?"

"Noooo, God no. We were just kissing... and stuff."

"You haven't even told us that you are going out with him," her mother said reproachfully.

Hermione swallowed. That was the part where she was *forced* to lie. She had toyed with the idea of owning up to her parents and telling them about the impending Marriage Law. However, she had decided against it.

Her parents were Muggles, and it would be difficult for them to understand how in wizarding society arranged marriages could be part of the law. This concept was contradictory to everything that Muggles considered to be Human Rights. Her parents would not understand. For what it was worth, Hermione had been a part of the wizarding world for almost seven years now, and she had trouble accepting this law.

"I have been with Fred for a few months now," Hermione lied, immediately feeling guilty because of it.

"Are you out of your mind? You used to like his brother." Her mother was visibly scandalized. "Mrs. Weasley wrote us your actions upset the whole household. What were you thinking? This is not the way we taught you to behave when you are a guest in someone's home."

"Mum, I'm sorry, but..."

"There are no buts!" Mr. Granger continued where his wife had left off. "You cannot behave like this. And that boy, Fred? Didn't you tell us he and his brother dropped out of school? That explains a lot."

"What does it explain?" Hermione asked hotly. She was on the verge of losing her control.

"Why you don't want to further your education," her mother elaborated. "We've talked to you about it on Christmas. Or at least we tried to. Why aren't you applying to universities? You have such exceptional grades. You are Head Girl. If it is that boy's influence..."

"Mum, I told you, we are at war. Don't you understand? There won't be time to go and study for some degree or diploma."

"Hermione, you are no soldier, you are a little girl. No one can force you to fight. If you would just apply to a few colleges." Mrs. Granger sounded desperate.

Hermione almost screamed in frustration. They had had this conversation multiple times during the few days she had stayed with her parents over the holidays.

She couldn't convince her parents that the wizarding world was in an actual state of war. And she certainly couldn't make them believe that she had to stand at Harry's side. Her parents turned blind and deaf when she tried to explain to them the danger they were all in. Compared to her parents, even Fudge had accepted Voldemort's return with open arms.

"No, I cannot apply to colleges," Hermione said through clenched teeth.

"This isn't like you," Mr. Granger accused. "We barely recognize you anymore."

"Mum, Dad, this is what I have to do. *I am* a witch and *I am* a part of this world."

"I wish you wouldn't be a witch!" Her father shouted. "We barely know you, and it's your fault. You spend your whole time with those people, even when you don't have to be at school. You have turned your back on everything we have taught you. It's almost like you are not our daughter anymore."

Hermione looked at her father in shock. The pain his words were causing her was too much for her to bear. Abruptly, she turned and ran away.

As Hermione ran through the front door of the house she had grown up in, her only thought was to get as far away as possible. She ran along the familiar street, for once not taking comfort in the sight of the old tree at the corner, where she had sat under as a little girl reading her beloved books, or the pretty birdhouse their neighbours set up every winter. It was impossible to count the times she had seen all this, it was her home; yet, as Hermione's feet pounded along the icy street, all the familiar sights seemed alien to her. The snow-covered houses and gardens, which in the morning had seemed peaceful and romantic, had turned cold and uninviting.

Once Hermione was sure to be outside the wards, which the Ministry had set around the Granger's residence in order to protect one of Harry Potter's best friends and her Muggle family, she grabbed her wand and Apparated to the only place she could think of going.

An instant later, Hermione reappeared in the small, walled courtyard behind the Leaky Cauldron. Due to the dangerous times they lived in, it was impossible to Apparate into Diagon Alley directly anymore. Hurriedly, Hermione counted the bricks in the wall above the dustbin and then tapped the wall three times with her wand. The entrance to Diagon Alley appeared, and Hermione walked through.

She didn't run anymore, owing to the desire to avoid drawing unnecessary attention to herself, but walked at a brisk pace through the thick curtain of snowflakes, which had started to fall, her wand clutched tightly in her hand. At this time of the day, the late evening, Diagon Alley appeared almost deserted. Only a few witches and wizards passed, clearly anxious to get off the streets and into the relative safety of their homes.

In a matter of minutes Hermione reached her destination: Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes. The store was closed for the night already. Hermione knocked at the door and waited, suddenly afraid that the twins were unable to hear her in their flat upstairs or that they might be out. Impatiently, she knocked again, and while she waited, Hermione became aware of the intense cold surrounding her. Hermione had not stopped to grab a coat when she had left the house, and the cold December wind was attacking her mercilessly, her thin sweater ill equipped to protect her from the severe cold.

When she knocked for the third time, she was relieved to hear a voice from the inside.

"Hold your Hippogriffs, I'm on my way."

The tingle of magical wards being removed could be felt, and a key turned inside the lock. Then the door swung open, and the face of one of the twins, Hermione couldn't tell which one, appeared.

"Hermione!" The twin gasped, clearly shocked.

"Hhhhhhi." was all Hermione was capable of saying through the violent chattering of her teeth. Her arms were numb with coldness, and she was hugging them to her body tightly.

"Merlin, come in!" She felt a hand taking her arm and pulling her inside the shop. The warmth inside only served to remind Hermione how cold she was. She found herself being led through the shop and through the backdoor towards a staircase.

"Fred, come here!" The voice seemed to come from a distance, even though Hermione knew the source was the man pulling her along beside him.

Hermione absently noted that, therefore, George must have been the one to open the door. She climbed the stairs with difficulty, feeling the heaviness of her bones with every step, but George kept a hand on her arm and pulled her along.

"Hermione?" That was Fred, standing in the door atop the stairs, which lead to the twins' apartment.

Hermione opened her mouth to explain her unexpected arrival, but found herself unable to formulate a clear thought through the fog that seemed to cloud her head. Instead, hot tears welled up in her eyes until they became too much to hold in and spilled out, leaving burning trails along her frostbitten cheeks.

Fred recovered enough from his shock to step forward and wrap a comforting arm around Hermione's shoulders. He led the crying girl towards the couch of the living room and sat down, hugging her body closely to his.

"Get me a blanket, she's shivering like mad," he said quietly to his brother.

George hurried to get the blanket and brought it to the couch. Fred took it from him and wrapped it firmly around Hermione. She showed no sign of reaction, but continued to cry into Fred's shoulder.

"Shhhh... everything's going to be okay," Fred whispered, running a hand along her back. "Shhhh."

"I'll make her some tea," George said. "That'll warm her from the inside." He left to go into the kitchen, leaving Hermione alone with Fred, who continued to hug her tightly.

Her tears subsided almost as quickly as they had come, and although Hermione was still shaking from the cold, she calmed down visibly.

"Are you ready to tell me what happened?" Fred asked tentatively.

Hermione raised her head from his shoulders, but didn't look at Fred.

"I got into a fight with my parents," she mumbled, embarrassed by her earlier outburst.

"About what my Mum told them?" Fred asked.

"Yes, it was bad."

There was a pause. Then, Fred admitted, "I don't know what to say."

"Me neither. I'm sorry I came barging in here like this, but I didn't know where else to go. Harry is still at the Burrow."

"Don't worry about it," Fred assured her.

George came back, a cup of tea in his hand. Hermione accepted it and took a small sip, feeling the tea burn its way down to her stomach.

"I'm going to spend the night at Lee's house," George announced, turning to leave.

Hermione straightened up quickly.

"You don't have to leave because of me. I'm sorry," she stood up. "I'll go."

"No, don't be stupid. You stay. Lee wanted to tell me about his new job anyways." With a quick nod towards his twin, George was gone before Hermione could protest any further.

"He is mad too, isn't he?" Hermione asked, looking at Fred apologetically.

"No... at least not with you. He's just a bit hurt because I supposedly kept you from him for months. We usually tell each other everything," Fred explained.

"I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing already. It's not like you chose all this. We have to do it, remember?"

Hermione let herself sink back onto the couch and sipped her tea again. It really was helping to warm her up. She cupped her hands around the mug, relishing in its warmth.

"How come you didn't even have a cloak?" Fred asked her after a while.

"I left rather hurriedly," Hermione replied evasively.

"Was..."

"Let's not talk about it," Hermione inserted, staring into her tea. She heard Fred sigh beside her, but other than that, he stayed silent. Hermione was thankful for that. The pain the day had caused her was still raw, and she was tired. Too tired to think about what had happened, let alone talk about it.

"The Pygmy Puffs escaped today," Fred suddenly said. "We've got a new employee, Tommy, who's a bit on the clumsy side. He forgot to lock the display cage. Unfortunately, we only noticed when three of the little buggers sprang onto our shelf with the Tickle Toss Powder and knocked over a few jars. The whole shop got dosed in it. Let me tell you, it's not easy to chase after Pygmy Puffs when you can't breathe for laughing."

Hermione smiled and Fred was satisfied. *Mission accomplished.*

They settled into a pleasant conversation about the shop, school and a thousand other topics, excluding any mentions of their families or their upcoming nuptials.

It was well into the night when Hermione couldn't stifle her yawns anymore that Fred suggested they go to bed. He actually offered to sleep in George's room, but Hermione declined, pointing out that George might think this odd should he come home earlier than expected. After all, he was assuming that they were quite eager to share a bed only one day ago.

So it came to be that Hermione and Fred spent their first night together, though both were careful to stay on their side of the bed. Hermione fell into an exhausted sleep,

wearing a pair of Fred's boxers and a t-shirt with the imprint 'Carrot Tops Are Green, Einstein!' and snuggling quite comfortably underneath the blanket. She thought that she would never have believed that one could talk this easily with Fred.

Fred took longer to fall asleep. Seeing Hermione wearing his clothes had forcibly reminded him of their kisses in his bedroom at the Burrow. Once again, he wondered how he could have possibly failed to notice Hermione's appeal before.

Eventually though, Fred succumbed to sleep as well, and they slept together peacefully with the possible exception of the times when Fred woke up because Hermione's hairs were suffocating him or when Hermione awoke feeling cold only to discover that Fred was hogging the sheets.

tbc

a/n: Please r/r. It's always good to know what the readers think about the story.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at wikt, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 5

The next morning George indeed returned before either Fred or Hermione woke up. He let himself into the flat at a quarter to eight. Eight was the usual time for the twins to open up their shop.

George knocked lightly on Fred's door and entered. He was greeted by the sight of his sleeping brother snuggling close to an equally comatose Hermione. Her head lay on Fred's chest, and his arms were closed protectively around Hermione. Their bodies had unbeknownst to their owners found a position where neither was forced to die of suffocation or hypothermia.

George just smiled and quietly closed the door. He could open Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes by himself for once.

Tommy Morgan was stacking a pyramid of Skiving Snackboxes ('special after holiday sale two for the price of one'). He was concentrating very hard, determined not to make another mistake. The mishap with the Pygmy Puffs the other day was still fresh on his mind. Who would have thought those little fur balls could cause such a ruckus?

He had been afraid to get sacked. Luckily, both his employers were blessed with a somewhat wicked sense of humour. They actually thought the chaos was good publicity and added to the atmosphere of their shop. Tommy was relieved. He thoroughly enjoyed his job at the joke shop and would have been very sad to lose it.

Still, he had been a bit nervous this morning when one of his bosses (he never could tell which one was Fred and which one was George) gave him the task of erecting the pyramid; especially because he had to do it by hand instead of using magic. The Weasleys had, soon after opening their shop, discovered that it was safer to stock their shelves without magic rather than to risk accidentally setting off some of their more sensitive products. But the morning had been quiet, as it was usual for that time of the day. Tommy made good progress.

That is, until the entrance door was thrown open with such force that glasses rattled in their shelves. Tommy, who was in the process of adding the top piece to his Skiving Snackbox pyramid, lost his balance and almost fell off the ladder on which he was standing. He caught himself just in time to see a redhead storming into the store.

The obviously angry man marched up to the counter where Tommy's boss, the only one that had shown up that morning, was currently busy filling out some ordering forms.

"Is she here, George? With him?" the redhead, whom Tommy concluded must be another of the Weasley brothers, demanded in a rude and impatient tone.

"Now, Ron..." George, if his brother was to be trusted to tell the twins apart in his anger, started with the obvious intention to try and calm his angry brother down.

But Ron wasn't even listening. Without another word he marched behind the counter and through the door that led to the flat above the shop.

Tommy watched as George hurried after him, his face worried. Just after the last of George's robes vanished behind the door, another man, this time with jet-black hair (ergo not a Weasley), entered the store. He seemed to be in a hurry as well, though his progress was slower due to the fact that he was limping slightly.

"Are they upstairs?" the black haired boy asked Tommy, who was still clutching the ladder. As he passed by, Tommy noticed the lightning shaped scar on the forehead. Tommy could only nod and then watched as the Boy-Who-Lived hobbled towards the staircase.

Before Tommy even had the chance to think about climbing off the ladder, the entrance door was thrown open again and a girl with flaming red hair, closely followed by two men whose hair was not surprisingly red too, appeared in the doorway.

"Upstairs," Tommy said, having a good idea what they were going to ask. The three Weasleys ran past him, almost tipping over the ladder in their haste to join the others, making Tommy struggle again to keep his balance again. Clutching the ladder, Tommy watched them go, curious about the reason for this invasion of Weasleys and their famous friend.

Just as Tommy was about to climb down the ladder, he heard a furious scream coming from the flat above him. Startled, he lost his footing and fell off the ladder right into his pyramid of Skiving Snackboxes.

Upstairs another fight, similar to the one at the Burrow on Boxing Day, was close to breaking out. George had been unable to catch his younger brother before he reached the flat. Finding the living room empty, Ron had immediately surpassed his search to Fred's bedroom.

Hermione and Fred were still asleep when Ron barged into the room. The sight of them cuddled close together made him scream. Luckily, George reached the bedroom at this moment and he was able to prevent Ron from flinging himself at Fred. Hermione and Fred had woken up at this point and were sitting in bed, albeit a bit disorientated and confused. Harry arrived soon afterwards. With a curious glance at the couple on the bed, Harry helped restrain Ron.

"What are you doing here?" Fred asked, clearly unhappy to be woken in such rude fashion.

"What am I doing?" Ron screamed at his brother, still trying to break free from Harry's and George's grips. "What are you doing?"

"I was sleeping," Fred stated dryly, his tone indicating that a three-year-old could have figured that out.

"With Hermione?" Ron screamed.

Fred was about to answer his brother, but Hermione spoke before he had the chance.

"I fail to see how this is any of your business."

"Not my business?" Ron choked.

"Exactly! Where or with whom I spent the night does not concern you," Hermione replied angrily.

The exact moment she said those words, Ginny, Bill and Charlie stormed into the bedroom. All three of them stopped dead in their tracks, staring open mouthed at Hermione. Ron, however, could not be deterred.

"Of course, it concerns me. I am your friend and I have the right"

"Being my friend does *not* give you the right to decide what I do with my life, Ronald. Besides, I don't even know if you are my friend anymore considering your behaviour towards Fred and me!"

"I certainly don't want to be *friends* with you anymore," Ron spat.

"What are you even doing here then?"

"I was looking for you because your parents contacted mine after you ran away from home. Apparently, they're worried about you. Imagine that."

Throwing one last insult at Hermione and his brother, Ron turned on his heel and stormed out of the room.

"Unbelievable!" Ginny muttered in the general direction of the bed and followed Ron. Both Charlie and Bill went after their siblings. They hadn't said a word since they came to the flat, and Hermione had the distinct impression that they had only come to have an eye on their younger siblings.

When only the twins, Harry and she were left in the apartment, Hermione let herself fall back on the bed, where she had been sitting the whole time.

"We Weasleys certainly know how to throw a party," George commented dryly.

"That we do," Fred replied heavily.

"Are you alright?" Harry asked Hermione worriedly. She had her eyes closed and didn't move.

"Hermione?" Fred asked as well. He was still beside her in the bed and extended a hand to her shoulder to get her attention. Reluctantly, Hermione opened her eyes, and all three guys in the room were relieved to see they were dry.

"I'm okay. I just don't think Ron will ever forgive me."

"I'm sure he'll come around," Fred consoled her.

"Yeah, he's always been a bit slow on the uptake. You need to give him some time," George assured her. Hermione snorted and looked doubtful.

"Did you hear the things he said just now?" she asked George.

"Yeah, well, I'm just saying he's not going to hold a grudge forever. I mean, Harry is okay with this, too," George said, gesturing towards Harry. Harry shook his head.

"I don't think that's the same. I never wanted to date Hermione. No offence..." Harry paused for a second and scrunched up his nose, "but dating Hermione would be like dating my Aunt Petunia."

"Excuse me!" Hermione shrieked, finally sitting up again. She looked scandalized at being compared to the older woman, about whom she had only heard bad things.

"Well," Harry tried to explain his rather disturbing statement. "You're like a sister to me... and she is my only living female relative..."

Hermione still looked like she wasn't sure if he was paying her a compliment or insulting her.

"Blimey, Harry," Fred said, shaking his head disbelievingly. "You better hope that you stay famous..."

"...because you certainly can't rely on charm and eloquence when trying to woo a girl," George finished the sentence.

Everybody laughed.

"Well, I better be off then," Harry announced when they had all calmed down. "I'm going to try to pacify everyone at the Burrow." Hermione was once again glad that Harry was on her side. It would make returning to Hogwarts for the second half of her last year a bit more bearable.

"See you at the train," she told him.

When Harry was gone, George went back down to the shop (presumably to oversee Tommy Morgan's second attempt at a Skiving Snackbox pyramid), and Fred and Hermione stayed upstairs.

"I should probably let my parents know that I'm okay. They are mad enough as it is."

"How bad was the fight you had with them yesterday?" Fred asked tentatively. So far, Hermione hadn't been very forthcoming with information regarding that topic, and he didn't want to push her.

"Bad," Hermione said slowly, choosing her words carefully. "I don't think it was just about me being with you. That was only the catalyst. There were a lot of unresolved

issues between us, and my Dad said some really hurtful things."

Fred very much wanted to assure her that her parents were going to calm down and that everything would be alright again, but he thought this would sound stupid given the fact that he didn't even know the Grangers. Besides, he knew his own family, and he couldn't even tell if his fight with *them* would ever end.

"You can always stay here if you don't want to go back to your parents," Fred said instead.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course. You're going back to Hogwarts in a few days anyways. I'm sure George won't mind."

"That would make things a lot easier." Hermione sounded relieved, and as an afterthought, she added, "I guess, it will really convince everyone that we're a couple."

Hermione Apparated to a secluded spot near her home and walked the rest of the way. She hesitated for a brief moment, but then stretched out her hand to ring the bell. Just like the other night, her mother opened the door.

"Hermione, thank God, you're alright," her mother called out, relieved. She engulfed her only daughter in a hug. "I was so worried."

"I'm alright, Mum," Hermione mumbled, feeling bad about causing her mother anxiety.

Hermione followed her mother inside the house into the living room. There, her father got up from the couch on which he had been sitting with a glass of Brandy. His face looked less welcoming than her mother's. Hermione took a few steps towards him.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

Hermione looked her father straight in the eye when she answered, "I was with Fred."

"How dare you? Your mother and I have been sick with worry, and you were off having a good time with your boyfriend!" her father shouted.

"What was I supposed to do?" Hermione screamed back at him, losing her temper quickly. "After what you said about me being a witch"

"You should not have run away like this."

"You should not have said" Her father's glass, which he was still holding in his hand, exploded. Hermione abruptly stopped shouting and took a deep breath. Her father was still standing next to the sofa looking angrily at her. Shards of glass littered the floor.

Hermione's hands were fisted into tight balls, and she was controlling herself with difficulty. Taking one more breath, Hermione said in a forced but calm voice, "I am sorry I scared you. I didn't mean to. But I think it is best if I stay with Fred until I go back to school."

"You will not see that boy again, and you are certainly not going to live with him!" her father replied, still screaming.

"I'm sorry, but you can't tell me what to do anymore!" Hermione turned to leave and saw her mother standing at the door. She had been in the room during the whole fight, but hadn't said a word.

"I'm sorry, Mum."

"Hermione" she began to speak, but Hermione sidestepped her mother and left the living room. Slowly she went upstairs and into her room to gather her belongings.

Once more, Hermione threw a few odd items into her mostly packed trunk and closed the lid. She looked around her room. It was very much the room of a young girl, complete with colourful wallpapers, as well as books and stuffed animals on every available surface. Hermione had spent too little time in there as an adolescent to change it.

Now she was a young adult, and even though she didn't dare to say it out loud, it was unlikely that she would return to her room; at least not permanently. By the time she finished with school, she would already be Mrs. Fred Weasley.

Hermione had never much thought about what to do after Hogwarts. Sure, she had looked into possible careers when trying to select her classes, but she had never sat down and made practical plans for her future. Part of it was because she knew that before she would be able to have any kind of future, she would need to stand beside Harry in his fight against Voldemort. No one would have a future before he was defeated.

Even if she had made plans, marriage at the age of 18 would not have been part of them.

There was a second reason why Hermione had avoided thinking about her future. It was because she knew that she would have to make a choice. She would have to decide whether she wanted to live in the magical world or as a Muggle. Doing both at the same time would be impossible.

She had neglected her parents over the last few years as it was, and she had lost basically all contact to her former friends. On the rare occasion that she happened to be home, there had just been nothing to talk about with them.

Without Hermione noticing, she had become a stranger to her Muggle friends and eventually even to her family. This was, Hermione was sure, why her actions today were so significant. She was leaving her home and she knew that from today on she could only return as a visitor; if at all. She was no longer a part of that world.

Hermione took one last look around her former bedroom. Then she grabbed her trunk and closed the door behind herself.

Her parents were still in the living room. Leaving her trunk in the corridor, she knocked on the door and went inside.

"I've got my stuff. I'll go now."

Her mother came over and gave her a hug. When Hermione saw her cry, she almost started crying herself.

"Be careful," Mrs. Granger advised, before squeezing her grown-up daughter one more time and then letting go.

Hermione looked over to her father. "Dad?"

"I've got nothing left to say to you," he said coldly and didn't even turn around.

Hermione felt like someone had kicked her in the stomach. Without another word, she left the living room. Taking her trunk, she slowly made her way out of the house. She didn't stop to look back, but walked continuously onwards until she was able to Apparate.

She didn't return to the flat right away. Dragging her trunk behind herself and ignoring the pain in her arms caused by the heavy weight, Hermione walked around the London streets for hours. In vain, she tried to think of something she could have done better, something that would have prevented the fight with her father.

In the end, she was forced to admit that she had decided to be a witch, to stand beside Harry and do everything she was able to do to help the Order fight Voldemort. The personal sacrifices she had to make were nothing compared to the pain Voldemort had caused others.

Anyhow, there was hope that one day they would defeat Voldemort, and life would be happy again. Still, she was sad her parents hadn't been more supportive of her decisions, even though they could not understand them.

Fred was at the flat when she returned. Without a word, he stepped towards her and engulfed her in a hug. Hermione let herself cry onto his shoulder. This had seemed to become a habit, for she had done so several times already during the last two days.

Fred didn't mind though. He would hold her close until her sobs died down and her tears subsided. While she cried, he remembered his first talk with Professor McGonagall about the Marriage Law. The Headmistress had repeated several times how important it was that Hermione were to be saved from the Death Eaters. Fred thought it to be ironic that now it was not the Death Eaters who were causing the girl in his arms any pain, but their own families.

When Hermione finally calmed down, Fred suggested they go to bed.

tbc

a/n: Sorry for the long wait, but I had to do loads for University and didn't have as much time for writing/editing as I'd have liked.

Thanks for all the reviews. I'm totally blown away. Keep the feedback coming.

Also, thanks to my awesome beta readers Lockofcurls and MBPrincess, who saved Fred and Hermione from death by 'hibernation'.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

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a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 6

Fred and Hermione's second night together brought no change to their sleeping arrangement. They fell asleep on opposite sides of the bed and awoke cuddled closely together with Hermione's head on Fred's chest.

The moment Hermione opened her eyes and realised where she was, a blush crept up her face. She tried to get up without stirring Fred, but found this to be impossible due to the tight grip he kept on her waist. There was nothing she could do to get free. In the end, her wriggling woke Fred up, and he let go of her.

"Sorry," Hermione mumbled, getting up quickly and keeping her head down so he wouldn't see her blush.

"Ah, don't you worry," Fred answered with laughter in his voice. "There are by far worse things that can happen to a wizard than waking up to find a pretty witch is using him for her pillow."

Hermione knew he was only teasing her, but all of a sudden his words brought tears to her eyes. She retreated into the bathroom before Fred could notice. The last couple of days had wreaked havoc on her emotions, and it had left Hermione completely confused and irrational.

She was unbelievably sad about her family's reaction, and the same held true for the Weasleys'. She had expected Ron to be upset, but never thought that her supposed relationship with Fred would cause so many people to be angry.

Hermione was grateful to have at least Harry's support. She felt guilty about forcing him to choose between herself and Ron, but found that there was nothing she could do about it. She would have liked to be noble and tell Harry that he shouldn't worry about her and that Ron was his best friend and he should comfort him. Except, Harry was the only friend she had left at the moment, and Hermione was sure that she couldn't go through with all of it without Harry's support. She couldn't afford to be noble.

Of course, there was Fred, who was acting ever so sweet and understanding. But that just served to confuse Hermione even more. Two months ago she had barely known Fred. Sure, they had gone to school together. She used to yell at the twins when they were abusing first-years for their experiments, and he was Ron's brother. Yet, they had never been friends, never had a conversation that didn't involve all the others, and Hermione's opinion of Fred had been confined to the troublemaking prankster everybody believed him to be. Truth be told, she hadn't even been able to tell Fred and George apart, both their physical appearance and their characters seeming identical to her.

That day in Professor McGonagall's office had been the first time she had been aware of Fred other than him being one part of the Weasley twins. Ever since then, she had come to realise that there was far more to Fred Weasley. Through their letters she got to know him a bit better, and the last few days brought them closer together. Hermione hadn't expected this and, consequently, was quite confused by the sudden shift in the dynamics between them.

She liked being close to him...emotionally as well as physically. She couldn't deny that. Her passionate reaction to their make-out session (the thought of it still made the heat rise in Hermione's cheeks) wasn't even the most confusing part of it all. After all, it could be explained away as being hormone induced. Fred Weasley wasn't exactly bad to look at, quite the opposite in fact, and it was only natural that she reacted to him.

No, that wasn't what had Hermione so terribly confused. It was that she liked the small things about Fred, like his hand on her shoulders when he tried to comfort her, his arms encircling her body when they hugged or just simply sitting close to each other on the couch and talking. It was comfortable, and it made her feel safe, despite all the trouble they were going through at the moment. They were in it together, and knowing that was comforting. And terribly confusing.

Hermione splashed cold water into her face and got ready for the day. When she exited the bathroom, Fred was still in bed, though he was awake and reading the Prophet.

"You okay?" he asked her, looking up from the pages.

That was another thing she hadn't expected. Fred was incredibly perceptive when it came to other people. She supposed it was a helpful trait for a prankster.

"Yeah," Hermione answered, albeit a little bit untruthfully.

Fred just shot her a look, revealing that he knew she was lying, but he didn't call her on it. Instead, he got out of bed and headed for the bathroom, stopping by her side for just a moment to give her a quick kiss on her cheek.

Hermione was quite stunned and stared at the now closed bathroom door for a full minute. She was confused...but she felt better.

They had breakfast together with George in the small kitchen of the twins' apartment. George seemed to have mostly forgiven them for keeping their relationship a secret. So, apart from the moment when Fred burned the toast, the meal went off without any drama. According to George, burned toast was a common occurrence when having breakfast with Fred.

Afterwards, the twins went down to their shop (after Christmas sales were going strongly), and Hermione settled down in the living room. Spreading her books around her, she pushed everything that troubled her out of her mind and concentrated on her studies.

That's how Fred found her at noon.

"I'm not sure if I should admire your drive or check you for brain-capacity expanding potions. Those are illegal, you know."

Hermione stuck her tongue out, but closed the book in front of her nonetheless.

"Some of us actually want to take our N.E.W.T.s."

"Are you sure? Cause that just seems like an awful waste of time to me," Fred answered.

Hermione shook her head and made to open her book again, but Fred grabbed her by her wrist and pulled her off the couch.

"No studying during lunch. Come on," he said. And without waiting for her to say something, Fred pulled Hermione with him out of the door.

"We usually eat our lunch down in the shop, so we can keep an eye on everyone at the same time," he explained while they walked down the stairs.

"There you guys are!" George yelled when Hermione and Fred entered one of the rooms in the back of the shop, which Hermione immediately recognised as the staff room. The room was packed with people, all of them wearing the bright magenta robes with the WWW emblem.

"We had to hire some temporary workers in order to cope with the workload during the time most pupils are at home," Fred told her, obviously trying to explain the rather large number of people present in the small room. Fred grabbed plates for them and then pushed his way through the crowd to the table in the middle of the room.

On top of the table was a huge pile of take out food. To Hermione it looked like somebody raided all the restaurants in Diagon Alley, the ones that were still open anyway. Snatching her plate from Fred, she helped herself to some food, taking her time to decide what she wanted to eat, and then looked around for a place to sit. All the chairs were already taken, and some people were actually sitting on the floor.

She spotted Fred, who, probably due to his status as boss, had been able to get a chair. He was currently in a conversation with George and one of their employees, whilst holding his plate in one hand and occasionally shovelling some food in his mouth. Hermione walked over to them and gave a polite cough, "hem, hem," which would have left Dolores Umbridge green with envy.

Both Fred and George immediately looked up, then grinned at her. Hermione used Fred's current state of surprise and sat down sideways on his lap. She didn't like eating on the floor.

Fred laughed. Hermione could barely hear the sound of it through the immense noise everyone was making, but she felt Fred's chest vibrating. She turned her head slightly, so she could see Fred's face and saw the amusement in his eyes. She smiled at him.

Fred brought his free hand behind her head and, to Hermione's surprise, pulled her in for a kiss. The kiss was light and tender, and Hermione could taste shepherd's pie off his lips.

"Some of us are actually trying to eat." George's comment made them pull apart.

"Jealousy doesn't become you, brother," Fred replied, but continued eating. George winked at Hermione and stuffed a piece of chicken into his mouth.

Hermione wriggled a bit on Fred's lap, so she could find a comfortable spot, and finally, leaning back against his chest, started to eat, too. Though she appeared calm on the outside, her insides were jumbled in a confused mess. Had Fred just kissed her to convince his brother that they were a couple? Or was there more to it?

She couldn't make up her mind. Furthermore, Hermione refused to analyse her decision to sit on Fred's lap (they ~~had~~ to pretend) or the feelings that shot through her body when he kissed her (*hormones*, of course). Still she couldn't deny that she was very comfortable.

Fred spent the remainder of the afternoon deep in thought. George noticed, of course. He flat out told Fred that if he were to start acting like a love-sick puppy, George would hex Fred's hair green and charm his nose to look like that of a pig's, so nobody would know they were related. Fred told him to 'sod off'.

After he had knocked over more items during one afternoon than Tommy Morgan did in a week and several of his employees had asked if he was ~~okay~~, Fred went to the back of their shop to do inventory. At least, this way there would be nobody else around to witness his next mishap or ask stupid questions.

When Fred had counted their stock of Canary Creams for the third time, each time with a different result, he gave up on any pretence of work and sat down on the floor instead. Though he wasn't as shallow as everybody believed him to be, he wasn't overly pensive either. But he felt that a situation like this called for some pondering.

Fred blamed his current case of clumsiness on his lack of sleep. He had shared his bed with Hermione twice now, and both times he had fallen asleep ridiculously late because it was fairly difficult for him to relax next to her. She was just too damn attractive when she wore his clothes (for some reason unknown to him, Hermione had decided to keep wearing his shirt and boxers to bed, even though she had her own clothes at the flat now).

The attraction he felt towards Hermione had caught Fred entirely off guard. Having perceived her as nothing but his younger brother's brainy friend before, he had never paid close attention to her. Of course, that had changed once Professor McGonagall had informed Fred that Hermione was the girl he would be spending the rest of his life with.

Although Fred had never considered *not* helping Hermione, he had been less than thrilled at the prospect of marrying her at the beginning. It seemed obvious to him that they didn't have much in common and probably would get bored with each other quickly.

However, the opposite turned out to be the case. Fred was forced to admit the old saying "opposites attract" was not completely unfounded. He would never admit it at this point, but the kiss during lunch had been as much for his benefit as for the sake of keeping their ploy authentic.

Fred had been worried whether they would be able to convince George. If anyone would see through their farce, it would be his twin. But, so far, George appeared to have bought their story. Moreover, he seemed to have accepted that Fred and Hermione were a couple; unlike the rest of their family.

Fred had never expected this whole relationship... *thing* with Hermione would be easy, but, just like Hermione, he had been ill prepared for the anger it provoked in his family. He was more than a little hurt to see them side with Ron so easily. Of course, he would have felt extremely bad were he actually pursuing a relationship with his little brother's crush of his own volition. Still, he couldn't help but think that everybody else had no business yelling at him. Ron and Hermione hadn't even been dating!

Frustrated, Fred got up from the floor and started pacing. At least George had come around quickly. Fred couldn't have borne it if his twin had stayed mad at him. They had never had a fight that lasted longer than a couple of hours.

"Everything alright?" George poked his head through the door.

'Speak of the devil,' Fred thought.

"I'm fine," Fred said, though his frustration made the statement sound a lot harsher than he had intended. He saw the annoyance flash over his brother's face before George left. Fred felt even guiltier than before. Here he was, feeling grateful because George had forgiven him so easily, and then he had nothing better to do than snap at the one family member currently willing to speak to him. Maybe he should Floo Percy. Chances were the git was desperate enough for some contact to his family to talk to him.

"Are you okay?" The next person interrupted his solitary reverie with that inane question. Fred was about to shout back that he 'would be bloody fine when everybody stopped asking him stupid questions' when he saw that it was Hermione who stood in the door. So he refrained from shouting and continued to pace around the room.

He heard the door close, but didn't look up. The fact that he couldn't decide whether he wanted Hermione to be gone or not only served to antagonize him even more. Since when was he behaving indecisively around a girl?

"George said I should come and talk to you."

Fred considered killing his twin, but didn't answer. He couldn't explain the mood he was in, and he had never been one to talk about his 'feelings' anyway.

"I'm really sorry." Her last statement broke him out of his brood.

"Whatever are you sorry for?" Fred asked bewildered.

"It's all my fault, isn't it? If it weren't for me, your family would never be mad at you."

"Hermione, that's bull, and you know it. If anyone is to blame then it's You-know-who and those spineless idiots who follow him."

"But..."

"No buts, you didn't choose this, and therefore, it's not your fault."

"So you're not mad at me?"

"What? No!" Fred walked over to the spot near the door where she stood. He brought one of his hands under her chin and tipped her head up, so she would look at him.

"What gave you that idea?"

"Well, you're doing all this just to protect me ... and our families are so angry ... You wouldn't have to go through all of this if it weren't for me."

"This is not your fault," Fred repeated, all the annoyance gone from his voice. "I'm not mad at you."

"But you're not okay either."

Fred sighed. "No, probably not. But I'm going to be. We both will. Our families will come around eventually."

Hermione looked at him sceptically.

"Well, it might take some time," he amended. "Maybe a few years ... or several decades perhaps. Nevertheless, they are bound to miss us at some point, and then they'll come crawling on their knees, begging for forgiveness."

Hermione couldn't help but smile. Glad that he had managed to cheer her up, and feeling a bit cheerful himself (though firmly ignoring the question as to why Hermione was able to lift his gloomy mood with a single smile), Fred slung an arm around her shoulders, and they left the room together. On their way up to the flat, Fred saw his twin at the other side of the shop. He mouthed a silent 'sorry' and George nodded.

Fred and Hermione spent the evening in the living room, both of them reading and feeling quite thankful for the break in the mini-drama their lives had become. They went to bed early, feeling exhausted. Hermione opted to wear Fred's clothes again. Consequently, Fred found himself unable to fall asleep, regardless of his tiredness.

After lying in bed for about two hours, trying not to think about the witch next to him and feeling pretty ridiculous because of it, Fred was desperate enough to do anything, just to be able to fall asleep. He tried several methods of relaxation, all of which failed. As a final resort, Fred tried, by far, the oldest remedy for insomnia: counting sheep.

However, he soon found this to be boring, though unfortunately not boring enough to fall asleep.

Therefore, Fred tried to pep up the image a bit, and instead of counting sheep, which jumped over a gate, he imagined Professor Snape, hitching up his black cloak and jumping instead. Thinking that it was a bit far fetched that Professor Snape would be jumping over gates, Fred's overly tired mind conjured up a steaming cauldron.

He counted the 138th Snape, jumping over the cauldron, by the time he mercifully fell asleep.

tbc

a/n: Reviews are love.

Thanks go to my lovely betas Katia and Joey.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at WIKTT, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 7

The few short days between Christmas and New Year were over quickly. Hermione and Fred had gotten used to living together surprisingly fast and, despite their families still being angry at them, found they could somewhat enjoy the remaining days of Hermione's Christmas break.

Fred and George closed the shop early on New Year's Eve. They had told Hermione that they were going to a small party that Angelina Johnson was throwing. Hermione soon realized that 'they' meant all three of them and 'small' at least 50 people.

She had spent an uncharacteristically long time on trying to decide on an outfit before feeling disgustingly like a girly-girl. Therefore, she decided to just wear some black cargo pants and one of her nicer tops. Leaving her hair down and applying only a minimal amount of make-up, Hermione left the bathroom quickly, lest she look into the mirror and see Lavender Brown looking back at her.

When she exited the bedroom, Fred seemed to like what he saw at any rate.

They arrived at the house fashionably late...the twins had insisted...and the place was already packed. Hermione, feeling quite nervous all of a sudden, took Fred's hand, and he squeezed it reassuringly.

"You're going to be fine," he told her before pulling her behind him inside the house.

The first person they encountered was Angelina herself, who stood in the entrance hall close to the door, greeting her guests.

"George, Fred," she yelled over the loud music that came from the living room. "I'm glad you made it." She pulled each of them into an one-armed hug.

"And Hermione." Angelina gave Hermione an enthusiastic hug as well. "We have to talk later," Angelina told the perplexed girl looking pointedly at Fred.

Hermione was spared the obligation to reply by the arrival of yet another couple of guests. George took off immediately in search of 'someone to kiss at midnight,' as he told his brother and Hermione before leaving.

Hermione let Fred pull her along and soon found herself in the huge living-room. There were a few tables with chips and other snacks and a vast supply of beverages...most of them alcoholic. The music was even louder than in the entrance hall, and since Hermione couldn't see a stereo, she correctly guessed that the source of the music was magical.

A few people were dancing already, whereas most of them were sitting on a mismatched ensemble of couches and armchairs, which were scattered all over the room.

As they moved around the room, Hermione noticed quite a few people staring in their direction and pointing. She squirmed uncomfortably.

"Gossip certainly spread fast, considering it's the holidays," Fred commented, handing Hermione a drink before taking one for himself.

"I noticed. Angelina didn't seem surprised at all that we showed up together." Hermione carefully sipped at her drink and, deciding that it was too strong, made a face.

"I expected that. She's currently dating Lee Jordan. According to George, she was there too when he showed up at Lee's a couple of days ago, telling him that he needed a place to crash so we wouldn't be disturbed. I would have loved to see their faces."

Wordlessly he took Hermione's drink from her and took a large gulp from it, emptying the cup by a third. Then he refilled the cup with more coke.

"Here, try if that's better."

Hermione accepted the cup back and took another experimental sip. The coke sufficiently diluted the drink, and she found she actually like it now. She gratefully smiled up at him.

"Thanks," she said.

Soon they were joined by several of Fred's friends, who, although they refrained from asking them directly how they got together, shot curious glances towards Hermione.

Hermione didn't like the attention she was receiving from standing by Fred's side. Although she wasn't overly shy, she had never been one for the spotlight, unless maybe it was due to academic achievement. Hence, she didn't appreciate being the main attraction of the evening. A sideways glance to Fred only served to tell Hermione what she already knew: Fred liked the attention. That revelation came hardly as a surprise since the twins had practically been famous at Hogwarts.

Fred seemed to be aware, though, that Hermione was uncomfortable and did his best to insure that she could enjoy the party as well. He made sure she was supplied with drinks (Hermione was grateful to have something to occupy her hands), and he stayed close, careful not to leave her alone at a party where she didn't know many people.

Though she had gone to school with most of the guests, they had almost exclusively been in the years above her. Therefore, Hermione recognized many of them by sight, but was hazy on the names and certainly hadn't spoken to most of them before.

Hermione had been less than enthusiastic whenever they had talked about the upcoming party, though she had had to agree with Fred that this was the perfect opportunity for people to find out about them. After all, that was what they wanted: public recognition, so they could convince their friends and family that they were in fact together.

Silently, Hermione had thought that convincing their friends, or for that matter Fred's friends, would be a lot more difficult than convincing their families. The Weasleys had only seen them snogging once and from then on were focused exclusively on their anger. They never stopped to look at the couple closely. Her parents had never even seen Fred, but relied on what Mrs. Weasley's letter and Hermione herself had told them.

Fred, who was developing a rather disturbing talent for reading her mind whenever she was worrying too much, had told her that if they were able to convince his twin, who actually lived with them and saw them every day, they could convince everybody. Hermione felt calmer after that.

"You want to dance?" Fred asked her when his friends moved away to join the growing crowd on the makeshift dance floor. Hermione shook her head vigorously.

"No. I told you..."

"You sure?" Fred asked laughing. Hermione glared at him, though she was not exactly mad. She had told him beforehand that she didn't like dancing too much.

"If you could dance with Krum in front of the whole school, you surly can manage one small dance with me in Angelina's cosy living room," Fred teased.

"I almost died of embarrassment when I had to dance in the Great Hall. I didn't know there would be public dancing when Viktor asked me out. Anyhow, Angelina's living room isn't cosy. It's so huge; you could fit the whole school in here."

"Now that's exaggerating," Fred answered, and the playful grin on his face told Hermione quite clearly to be on her guard.

"Let's make this a bet," he suggested. Hermione eyed him suspiciously.

"What kind of bet?"

"Well, I bet you that I will get you to dance with me today and, furthermore, that you will like it."

Hermione shook her head. "That will never happen."

"So where's the harm in betting then? You're bound to win, according to yourself," Fred said triumphantly.

There were alarm bells going off in her head...loudly.

To no avail.

Later on, Hermione blamed the drinks (though she had only had two, both of them mixed with coke, at that point) and the atmosphere of the party. Whatever the reason, she let Fred convince her that it was a good idea to make this bet.

"What are the terms?"

He gave her a victorious smile, and Hermione had the ominous feeling that betting with Fred Weasley wasn't the smartest idea she had ever had.

"How about the loser gives the winner a massage?" Fred suggested innocently.

Hermione swallowed; nevertheless, she found she couldn't back out now. She felt a blush rise to her cheeks.

"Okay." They shook on it.

"So would you like to dance with me?"

"No."

"Didn't think it would be that easy." Fred gave her a lopsided grin, and together they went over to a group of couches where Angelina, Katie, Lee, Oliver and some other people were talking about Quidditch. They sat down, and Fred immediately joined the conversation, whereas Hermione choose to listen to the music instead. She never understood what people found so interesting in sports anyway.

They had sat down for less than a minute when Angelina suddenly jumped up.

"I have to go to the bathroom," she announced, and Katie immediately got up to join her.

"You need to go too!" Angelina informed Hermione, and the two older girls pulled her off the couch.

"No, actually..." Hermione tried to defend herself from the ambush. At that moment she wouldn't have voluntarily gone to the bathroom if she had drunk a barrel of tea beforehand. But the other girls ignored her protests and dragged her with them. Hermione looked desperately over her shoulder, hoping Fred might save her. He just smiled and waved. *Bastard*.

Once they reached an upstairs bathroom, Hermione was pulled inside, and Angelina locked the door before sitting down on the edge of the tub. Katie leaned against the sink.

"Spill!"

"What?" Hermione, staying close to the door, asked in order to buy some time. This very much felt like the interrogation it was.

"You and Fred, of course. When did that happen? How?"

Hermione relented and told them the whole fabricated story about her and Fred really getting to know each other during the last summer when she stayed with the Weasleys at Harry's house and how they continued writing to each other once she was back at school.

"And when we saw each other after Christmas again, we just knew we wanted to be together," Hermione ended. Both girls were starring misty eyed and with goofy smiles at her.

Hermione worried about how much they had had to drink.

"Wow."

"That's such a romantic story."

"Well..." Hermione would have begged to differ, were she able to tell the truth. She supposed that nobody would think it to be romantic, were they to know that the whole story was just a scam so she wouldn't have to marry some disgusting Death Eater. Obviously, Hermione hadn't read enough romance novels (none, to be exact) to know that the hero sweeping in to save the damsel in distress from having to marry the evil villain was the epitome of romance.

"What did the Weasleys say?" Katie asked.

"I heard from Lee that they are angry?" Angelina asked slyly. Hermione suspected the girl knew most of the story already and just wanted to hear the gossip first hand.

"They were angry indeed. We hadn't told them..."

"Because of Ron? I always thought he carried a torch for you," Katie interrupted.

"Yeah. Mostly. He was pretty mad when he walked in on us."

"Ron Weasley walked in on you having sex with his brother?" Katie almost shouted.

"Noooo," Hermione assured the other girl quickly. If Katie kept screaming stuff like that, the whole party would be standing on the other side of the bathroom door, trying to listen in to their conversation. Hermione considered casting an Imperturbable Charm on the door, just to be safe.

"We weren't having sex... just kissing... on his bed." The blush she had fought so far, won, and coloured her face.

"What happened then?"

So Hermione was stuck telling them everything that had happened the last couple of days, too. As it turned out, the girls had heard from Lee that Hermione was currently living in the twins' flat, but had refused to believe him.

"You're parents really kicked you out?"

"It's more like me running away before they got the chance, but in essence, yes."

"Wow."

Hermione just nodded. She had no intention of discussing her parents with the girls.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Well, I'm going back to Hogwarts in two days..."

"We know that. I meant, are you going to keep living with Fred after school? How serious..."

Angelina's questions were interrupted by loud pounding on the door and some drunken party guest shouting that if they didn't let him into the bathroom soon, he would be peeing into the next flower pod. Angelina forgot all about Hermione and Fred's relationship and hurried out of the room, yelling at the drunk that she would personally hold him responsible if any of her mother's prized flowers were spoilt during the party.

Hermione used the opportunity to escape the interrogation. She went back downstairs and into the living room, trying to find Fred. She spotted him on the same couch where she had left him, still talking to Lee and Oliver. Although, when she sat down besides him, she had a feeling that the guys hadn't been talking about Quidditch anymore.

"About time," Fred told her, putting an arm around her shoulders. "I was considering sending out a search party for you."

"I can see you were worried sick about me," Hermione retorted, eyeing several empty shot glasses, which hadn't been around when she had left.

Fred just grinned.

The next few hours passed rather quickly, and Hermione was surprised to see that once she got over her nervousness, she was able to enjoy herself. After several drinks though (it had occurred to her at some point that she wasn't even sure what exactly she was drinking, but that whatever it was tasted good when mixed with enough coke) her head was spinning slightly. Although not exactly drunk, Hermione nevertheless came to the conclusion that some fresh air would do her good.

As Fred was talking rather animatedly to some boy who seemed only vaguely familiar to Hermione, she went onto the porch alone. It was a clear night, and she was immediately chilled when she stepped outside. Wrapping her arms around herself to get some warmth, Hermione leaned against the banister, which separated the porch from the backyard, and watched the clouds her breath made in the cold air. She enjoyed the silence for a while.

A few minutes later the door behind her was opened, and the music sounded overly loud against her ears. Someone stepped onto the porch and closed the door behind them. Instantly the music was muffled again. Hermione didn't need to turn around to know it was Fred who had joined her outside. She was proven right when he wrapped his arms around her from behind. His body was warm and, leaning back against him, Hermione enjoyed the closeness.

"Will you dance with me?"

Hermione just laughed. He had already asked her a dozen times throughout the evening, hoping to catch her off guard. Each time she had declined.

"You're not going to give up, are you?" she asked him.

"No, 'fraid not," Fred replied. They were standing so close she could feel his breath on her neck.

"Good." She turned around and gave him a kiss on his cheek before going back inside. He followed close behind.

They came back just in time to hear Angelina start chanting the countdown.

"10,"

The others joined in.

"9, 8, 7,"

Fred snaked a hand around Hermione's waist and pulled her close to him again.

"6, 5, 4,"

The guest screamed in unison. With the exception of Hermione, who was busy feeling Fred's body against hers, and therefore, currently unable to master the challenge of counting backwards.

"3, 2, 1"

Hermione felt Fred turning her so she would stand in front of him, pulling her even closer.

"Happy New Year!"

Everyone was shouting around them when Fred leaned in to kiss Hermione. He brushed her lips with his briefly, then slipped his tongue inside her mouth. Hermione brought her arms up around his neck and opened her mouth to him. Fred led his hands roam around her back.

They were lost in their kiss, forgetting the singing and kissing people around them for a moment.

"Happy News Year, George!" a rather inebriated Oliver Wood shouted, patting Fred on the back. Fred broke away from Hermione.

"You too," Fred told his former captain, obviously unhappy about being interrupted and not even bothering to correct his drunken friend.

"And Happy Years New to you!" Oliver shouted drunkenly at Hermione before throwing himself at the utterly astonished girl. Hermione hugged him back awkwardly, shooting a helpless look at Fred over Oliver's shoulder.

"That's enough, Wood," Fred said, pulling his friend away from his girlfriend. *Supposed* girlfriend, he had to remind himself, because he very much wanted to hit Oliver at the moment.

"How about you go and get yourself a nice cup of coffee?"

"But's New Happy Years. I have to kiss people!" Oliver slurred, and Fred took a step back, just in case. However, Oliver had already found another victim and threw himself at a passing girl, who, by the looks of it, didn't even know him.

Fred and Hermione laughed. Then Fred leaned towards Hermione again, obviously intending to resume their kiss. Alas, he was once again interrupted by some of his friends, only slightly less drunk than Oliver Wood, who wished the couple a 'Happy New Year.'

"Fred, have you seen George?" Angelina came rushing towards them. "He's supposed to do the fireworks together with Lee, but he didn't show up."

"Happy New Year to you, *too*. Now that you mentioned it, I haven't seen my dear brother since we got here." Fred raised his eyebrows, but didn't seem overly concerned. He left to help Lee with the fireworks instead, and the party-guests, including Angelina and Hermione, went outside to enjoy the show.

"I saw you and Fred kiss just now," Angelina said in between 'ooooooooohs' and 'aaaaaaaaaaaaahs' for a rain of golden stars and a gigantic purple shooting star. "I was wondering whether I would be forced to conjure up a bucket with cold water."

Hermione blushed for the umpteenth time that night and was at a loss for words.

She had dreaded the party out of fear people wouldn't believe their act, but had soon come to realise that she had no problem convincing people. The problem was reminding herself that she wasn't dating Fred for real.

When the fireworks were over, people went back inside. Those who hadn't been smart enough to bring their alcohol with them, in an effort to thwart the cold, immediately went to the tables with the drinks to rectify their mistake. The others went to refill their drinks.

Hermione went to a nearby table with drinks, too, desperately feeling that she needed something to get her mind off of the heated kiss she had shared with Fred at midnight. She rarely drank and consequently wasn't well versed in the assortment of long-drinks, which were covering the table. She picked a cup whose contents looked somewhat like the drink that Fred had supplied her with all evening and tasted it. It wasn't the same, but she found that she liked it, regardless.

Hermione had already emptied half the cup when Fred joined her, rubbing his hands together in an effort to warm them.

"What are you having?" he asked, peering into her cup.

"No idea," Hermione answered truthfully. "But it tastes good."

Fred laughed at this.

"I see, I have successfully corrupted you." He took a sip from her drink.

"Whisky-cola," he told her. "You might wanna be careful with the stuff."

"What was the other drink?" Hermione asked.

"Rum and coke."

They took more drinks and joined Lee and Angelina on one of the couches. Space was a bit rare, as most of the guests had chosen to sit down at this point, and Hermione ended up sitting on Fred's lap. He didn't mind.

"Have you found George?" Fred asked Angelina.

"No, and I can't find Alicia either. I haven't seen both of them since they arrived."

Fred grinned, but stayed silent.

"You don't think...?" Angelina jumped up and down in her seat. As her seat happened to be Lee Jordan's lap, her jumping caused the boy some considerable pain.

"Would you desist," he snapped, trying to hold the excited girl on his lap still. "It's not that exciting anyways. It was bound to happen."

"It was?" Hermione asked.

"They have liked each other for ages," Fred confirmed. The four kept talking, all the while consuming their respective drinks copiously.

After getting them fresh supplies, Hermione came back to sit on Fred's lap. She wriggled around to find a comfortable spot, just like she had done during their lunch in the staff room. Maybe a bit more.

His hands shot to her hips, halting her movement.

"If you keep this up," Fred all but whispered into her ear, "I won't be held responsible for my actions."

Hermione's breath caught in her throat, but she didn't back down. She leaned back and rested her head onto his shoulders. Fred didn't remove his hand from around her hips. Angelina and Lee had abandoned their conversation in favour of a rather public make-out session, so Hermione and Fred were free to sit in silence, enjoying each other's company.

Hermione's top had risen up slightly during her wriggling, and unconsciously Fred was drawing patterns with his thumb on her bare skin. It drove Hermione crazy. She inhaled deeply, and her nostrils were filled with the by now familiar scent of Fred's aftershave. If possible, she pressed herself even closer into his body.

"Will you dance with me?" Fred asked, more in an effort to keep his sanity while refraining from ravishing the girl in his lap on the spot than trying to win the bet.

Failing to remember the bet, Hermione actually forgot to refuse. She got to her feet, stumbling slightly, and once Fred had gotten up too, the couple went on the dance floor. The fast and upbeat songs from earlier in the evening had long stopped in favour of slower numbers.

Fred pulled Hermione into an embrace, listening to the drawn out rhythm of a love song, and together the couple swayed to the music. The heat coming off their bodies was intense and soon had them panting slightly, even though they weren't moving fast at all. Hermione raised her cheek from that comfortable spot on Fred's chest and tilted her head up towards him. Fred complied with her unspoken request and bent down to kiss her.

The heat between them intensified as their hands roamed freely around their bodies and their tongues duelled for dominance. All thoughts about the people around them had left their heads as they gave into the tension that had been building between them all evening.

Funnily enough, it was Oliver again, who was green faced and rushing towards the bathroom thereby bumping into Fred, who brought them back to reality.

"Maybe we should go home," Fred suggested. Hermione only nodded. Together the two made their way to the fireplace in the entrance hall, which was connected to the Floo network. Hermione took some Floo powder from the jar on the mantelpiece and threw it into the fire. As the flames turned emerald, they stepped inside and Fred intoned 'Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes' as clearly as he could in his current state.

They were jostled about quite a bit, but managed to get off at the right fireplace, stumbling into the living room of the flat. Hermione would have fallen to the floor had it not been for Fred's arms around her waist. The bumpy ride did not serve to mix well with the uncharacteristically large amounts of alcohol she had consumed during the party.

"Are you alright?" Fred asked when Hermione kept clutching his arms, trying to steady herself.

"Stupid world's spinn'ng..." Hermione mumbled.

"Let's get you to bed then." He helped Hermione to the bathroom where she luckily was able to change herself into her night-wear (his boxers and shirt, of course). By the time she stumbled out of the bathroom, Fred had been to the kitchen and gotten her a glass of water.

"Drink that. You will thank me in the morning."

Too exhausted to argue, Hermione gulped down the water and then let herself fall into the bed. She was asleep in an instant, and Fred actually needed to cover her with the sheets since she seemed to have forgotten to do so.

He sighed and changed, too. He lay down next to her and counted 1567 Snapes jumping over the cauldron before he was able to fall asleep.

tbc

a/n: This chapter was a bit longer than the other ones. I hope you still liked it.

Thanks, as always, to my two awesome betas Katia and Joey and to all my reviewers. Keep them coming.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

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a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 8

Hermione woke with a pounding headache. She refused to move or to even open her eyes, hoping the pain would miraculously go away.

"That's not going to work. Believe me, I've been there," came the amused voice of Fred from beneath her. She was once again using him as her pillow. Hermione just groaned.

"If you let me get up, I'll get you something for your head," Fred offered.

Hermione rolled off of him and buried her head in the actual pillows. Why did she have to drink so much the previous night? Why did she have to drink at all?

"I'm *never* going to touch alcohol again," she announced.

Fred laughed. "That's what they all say. Buck up, you didn't even get sick. You could be feeling a lot worse." Hermione didn't deem this worthy of an answer.

He left the room, supposedly to get her the promised remedy for her hangover, and Hermione tried to go back to sleep.

Fred was shaking his head, but grinned, as he entered the kitchen. There he found his disgruntled brother, hanging over a cup of coffee.

"Why, if it isn't the missing Weasley. Happy New Year, dear brother," he greeted him.

"Shut the hell up!" came the harsh reply from George.

"What happened? I thought you spent New Years Eve with Alicia?" Fred took a slice of toast and chewed on it.

"I did."

"Shouldn't you be happy then? I know you've liked her for ages," Fred asked.

George snorted. "Happy? I would be *happy* had she been actually there this morning. But no, she left sometime while I was asleep."

"Ouch!" Fred patted the back of his brother reassuringly and kindly refrained from pointing out that George himself had done this to countless witches in the past. Fred wasn't innocent by a long shot; however, between the two of them George was definitely the worse player.

"How was the party? I missed most of it," George asked, keen to change the subject.

"Great. Though Angelina might be slightly mad at you because you didn't do the fireworks."

"Oops, I completely forgot about that," George said, looking slightly guilty.

"I'll say..."

"Is Hermione still asleep?" George asked.

"Nah, just refusing to leave the bed. She's having the pleasure of experiencing her first hang-over. Which reminds me, I have to bring her a potion for the headache," Fred said.

He went to the cabinet above the sink and retrieved a vial filled with a sickly greenish liquid. Fred left his brother to brood over his coffee and went back to his bedroom.

"What took you so long?" a grumpy voice greeted him.

"I was talking to George," Fred explained, handing Hermione the vial. "Take that in one gulp and I promise you'll feel better."

Hermione eyed the vial suspiciously.

"Come on now, bottoms up," Fred encouraged.

Hermione uncorked the vial and tossed it down. Instantly her nose scrunched up, and she looked up at Fred with watery eyes and a look of utter disgust on her face. Fred was smart enough to keep a straight face.

"What—was—that?" Hermione asked slowly.

"Hang-over potion." Fred replied innocently.

"I think, next time, I'll stick with the headache," Hermione said. Fred laughed and got back into bed beside her.

"The headache is gone though," Hermione observed. Before she realised what she was doing, she laid her head on Fred's chest again and hugged the covers closer to them. Then she fell back to sleep.

Fred didn't move, not wanting to disturb her. He hadn't missed that she had deliberately snuggled up to him. That was different then cuddling in their sleep. The images of their kisses the other night were still fresh in his mind as well, and Fred was wondering how much of it had been for show or alcohol induced. Had Hermione really wanted to kiss him? It had seemed like it at the time, but now Fred wasn't sure.

Did he want Hermione to want to kiss him?

Had he not been afraid of waking her, Fred would have screamed in frustration. The situation between them kept getting more complicated and confusing by the minute, and the stupid Marriage Law hadn't even been passed yet.

Fred didn't stay in bed for long, because he found that he liked Hermione's body on top of his a bit too much. He slowly crept out of bed and went to get a shower—a really cold one.

By the time he left the bathroom, Hermione was still asleep and George had gone back into his room as well. Too restless to relax, Fred went downstairs into the closed shop to do some long-overdue paperwork. At least his current state of frustration led him to be productive, Fred surmised and got to work.

A couple of hours later, Hermione came down to find him.

"There you are," she said upon entering the shop. Fred was sitting at the counter, focusing on the papers which were spread all around him.

"Ah, the dead have finally risen," Fred replied, looking up from the paperwork. Hermione stuck her tongue out.

"Have you had something to eat yet?" she asked.

"Except a few bites of toast, no," Fred hurriedly stacked up the papers around him and shoved them haphazardly into a drawer.

"Let's go, I'm starving," he announced once he successfully cleared the counter. He grabbed Hermione's hand and pulled her towards the stairs.

"What is it with Weasley boys and food?" Hermione asked.

"I'm a growing boy. I need sustenance," Fred answered. Hermione just laughed.

They went upstairs and into the kitchen. George still hid in his bedroom, and while they prepared a late lunch together, Fred told Hermione about George and Alicia.

"And she just left during the night? That's nice," Hermione commented dryly. Fred snorted. They spent the rest of their time cooking in companionable silence, both of them caught up in their own thoughts.

"I'll be going back to Hogwarts tomorrow," Hermione finally said, as if Fred didn't know already.

"You're not looking forward to that?!" Fred replied, his words half question half statement.

"Ron and Ginny will be on the train, too. I highly doubt they've forgiven me yet, if they'll ever do. And there'll be a lot of gossip."

"You'll have Harry though."

"Yeah," Hermione sighed, "and I will be focused on my N.E.W.T.s anyways. Besides, it's about time I get out of your hair..."

"Don't be stupid. I like having you here."

Hermione looked up from the sauce she had been stirring while they talked. "Really?"

"What do you think?" Fred pulled her away from the stove and around so she would face him.

After doing the book-keeping for the shop *voluntarily* for three hours straight, Fred had been forced to admit to himself that he was not only physically attracted to Hermione, but that in the short time he had spent with her, he had already come to care for her. This realisation, though glaringly obvious, had come as somewhat of a surprise to him. He certainly hadn't expected to develop feelings for her beyond the realm of friendship when he had accepted Professor McGonagall's request to marry Hermione.

Fred wasn't one for games though—not when it came to relationships anyway—and given their special situation, Fred thought that honesty would be the best policy. Since

Hermione was staring open mouthed at him, he though it unlikely she would be answering his question anytime soon. Being at a loss for words himself and finding her opened mouth too inviting to resist, Fred renewed his favourite motto and let his actions speak the truth for him.

He closed the small space between them and captured her lips in a sweet kiss. Hermione was responding to him immediately, and for a while they were reduced to their lips and tongues dancing together.

Finally Fred pulled away slightly. He waited until Hermione opened her eyes. "Does that mean you'll go out with me?" he asked. Hermione laughed.

They were forced to return their attention to their cooking then because the sauce smelled faintly burnt.

George ventured out of his room by late afternoon. The sight of his brother cuddled closely to his girlfriend on their living-room couch did nothing to improve his mood. He was ready to swear off women altogether. He considered returning to his room, but unfortunately the happy couple had heard him enter and looked up.

"Still in a bad mood," his twin commented, immediately picking up on the vibes George was sending.

"So what?" George snapped, hardly in the mood to appreciate the brotherly bond that connected them and allowed them to intuitively sense each others moods. He let himself fall into an armchair.

He spared the two on the couch a quick glance. Something was different, though he couldn't put his finger on it. The bond worked both ways.

"Happy New Year," Hermione told him.

"You too," George told her with little enthusiasm.

"Have you heard from Alicia yet?" Fred asked.

"Let's not talk about that. Are either of you going to the dinner tonight?"

"Dinner?"

"The New Years dinner Mum has been planning for weeks. Did you forget about it?" Their horrified faces told George that they had. "So are you going?" The living room fell silent.

"Over my dead body. Ron's just going to shout at me again—or worse," Fred finally answered, and Hermione nodded her assent.

"That's what I thought." George got up with a sigh. "I'd better get ready then. Mum's never going to forgive me if I stay away, too."

He left the room. The mood between Hermione and Fred had changed drastically. Whereas they had been relaxed and happy before George had reminded them of the dinner at the Burrow, they now were tense and distinctly unhappy.

"I'm sorry you can't go to your family dinner because of me," Hermione said in a small voice.

Fred shook his head in annoyance. "How many times do I have to tell you that it's not your fault?"

"Sorry." Hermione retreated to the other side of the couch and picked up a random textbook, trying to focus on the words in front of her, though failing miserably due to the tears that burnt in her eyes and blurred her vision.

George soon re-entered the room, now wearing a white dress shirt and slacks. He took on look at Hermione and Fred sitting with stony faces at opposite sides of the couch, noticing the tears in Hermione's eyes and Fred pressing his lips tightly together, and practically ran for the fireplace. George barely allowed himself time to shout a good-bye before he threw the Floo powder, stepped into the green flames and vanished.

Hermione and Fred remained behind and continued giving each other the silent treatment for almost half an hour. Finally Fred broke and apologized, which caused Hermione to actually shed a few of the tears she had so desperately been trying to hold in. Fred quickly moved to her side of the couch and, not entirely sure how to treat a crying female, kissed her.

This proved to be the right thing to do. Hermione melted into his arms and returned his kiss with interest. Fred pulled her down so she would lie on the couch and covered her body with his. Only when he needed to breathe, he pulled away from the kiss and trailed a path of small kisses down the side of her face towards her neck.

"You know, I just remembered that you owe me a message," Fred announced in between kisses.

"What?" Hermione choked out, having difficulty following Fred's words.

"Well, you did dance with me yesterday," he started sucking on her collarbone, "which means, I won our bet."

Hermione needed to take a deep breath before she was able to answer him.

"Who says I actually enjoyed that?"

"Very funny." He stopped his ministrations on her collarbone and moved up to kiss her again. There wasn't any room for words until Hermione finally broke the kiss.

"Okay, then." She suddenly sat up on the couch, pushing Fred up with her. Before Fred somewhat comprehended what she was doing, Hermione had pulled his shirt above his head and threw it out of the way. Then she moved off the couch so he could lie on his stomach. When she straddled his backside, Fred realised that insisting on that massage might not have been a good idea.

Not that he didn't like her sitting astride his ass or kneading his naked back with her small hands—because he did immensely—but about five seconds into the massage he remembered forcefully how close he had come to loosing all control with her twice already (once in his bedroom at the Burrow, the second time at the party the other day).

The knowledge that he was heading straight for trouble didn't make him stop Hermione though. He didn't want to; her hands roaming around his back and neck felt too good. Besides he had won that bet fair and square. So Fred did the only thing any male in his position would have done—he quit thinking and enjoyed himself.

Hermione kneaded his back until every muscle in his back felt like putty underneath her hands. He was incredibly relaxed by then and, therefore, not expecting her next move at all.

She bent forward and whispered into his ear: "Turn around."

Fred's eyes shot open. *Did she mean...*? Before he could think any further about her request, he felt her weight lift from his back, and his body reacted before his mind had a chance to catch up. He found himself lying with his back on the couch, Hermione straddling his lower stomach. She continued to give his chest and arms the same treatment she had given his back.

Fred kept his eyes trained on her face, marvelling in her focused expression. She was concentrating completely on him, and he was fighting hard to keep his control.

Once his muscles were kneaded to her satisfaction, Hermione leaned forward and kissed him slowly and deliberately. Both their eyes fell shut as Hermione explored his mouth with her tongue. Fred raised his hands to her hips and slid them underneath her shirt. He let them roam around her bare back until he reached her bra.

He was about to pull the shirt over her head when the flames in the fireplace suddenly flared up. George appeared in the fireplace, a sour expression on his face. Dinner had obviously not been fun.

Hermione and Fred had ceased moving, but there hadn't been time to change the rather compromising position they were in.

"Really," George admonished with a rather wicked grin once he realised what he had just walked in on. "Your bedroom is less than ten feet away." He exited the living-room quickly. On his way out he called, "Wait until I tell Lee and Angelina ..." He let the door fall shut behind him.

Fred and Hermione took one look at each other then burst out laughing. When they were able to breathe normally again, Hermione got off of Fred, and they righted their clothes. The mood was effectively ruined.

"I need to pack my trunk anyways," Hermione mumbled, embarrassed.

"I should probably go and check with George about dinner." Fred gave Hermione a quick kiss and went to find his brother.

Hermione started picking up her books that were scattered all over the room, her mind still back on the scene on the couch. It took her a full ten minutes to realize that packing would be so much easier if she were to use her wand. So she did.

George told Fred the details of the family dinner, which had been terribly unpleasant as everybody had noticed Fred and Hermione's absence, though nobody dared to comment on it. Percy hadn't been present either.

"I got out of there as fast as I could. By the looks of it, your evening was far more enjoyable than mine," George ended his account. Fred shoved him, though there was no force behind it.

They met up with Hermione in the kitchen, where both she and Fred had a snack. George was still stuffed. Apparently Mrs. Weasley's cooking had been the only benefit to the whole evening, and since there had barely been any conversation out of fear of saying the wrong thing, everybody had busied themselves with putting food in their stomachs.

The three of them fell into a comfortable conversation, but soon called it a night. Everybody had to get up early the next day. It was time for Hermione to board the Hogwarts Express for the last time, and both twins had promised to accompany her to the platform. They knew how much she was dreading her next encounter with their family.

At night when he listened to Hermione's even breaths next to him, Fred realized how much he would miss her sleeping beside him. He would miss her. Period. Definitely a first time for him, as he had never been remotely as close to any of his previous girlfriends as he was to Hermione. He wasn't looking forward to the separation.

Although, Fred had hopes of at least being able to fall asleep in a timely manner when Hermione was far away in Scotland. He counted 3294 cauldron-jumping Snapes that night until he was able to stop thinking about Hermione's hands massaging his upper body and fell asleep.

tbc

a/n: Finally, I have returned from my summer holidays and here's the next chapter. I hope you guys enjoy. Reviews are love.

Thank you to my awesome betas Katia and Joey.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at WIKTT, I believe. I'm just borrowing...

a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 9

When Hermione woke up the next morning, she stayed as still as she possibly could. She knew that it would be time to leave for Hogwarts soon, but she just couldn't bring herself to get up; it felt too good lying close to Fred. Her head was rising and falling with every breath he took, and she felt warm and cosy. Hermione wished she could stay like this forever.

It had only been a few short days since she had run out of her home and came to stay with Fred, although, it certainly felt like much longer. Hermione couldn't explain what had happened between them. One day they were beginning a tentative friendship, and she mostly felt grateful that Fred had agreed to save her from an unwanted marriage, the next day her heart started beating faster whenever he was in the room, and she felt hot all over when he touched her. It was confusing, but at the same time it was the most exhilarating feeling she had ever experienced.

The alarm charm Fred had set the night before went off, and Fred began to stir.

"Morning. Ready to go back to school?" he asked.

"No." Hermione didn't move from her spot atop of Fred, and consequently he couldn't get up either; though he generally thought that this was a small price to pay for a position that comfortable.

"Not that I mind being in bed with you, quite the contrary actually, but if we don't get up soon, you'll miss the Express," Fred said, gently nudging her to get up.

"Don't care," Hermione mumbled, refusing to budge from her comfortable position atop Fred.

Fred stayed still for a moment. He knew Hermione was dreading going back to school because she was afraid to see Ron and Ginny again. He couldn't blame her; they had both been horrible to her.

"You can't hide in here forever," Fred finally said, his voice soft.

"I know," Hermione replied, still without showing any intentions of ever wanting to get up.

"Of course, I could always Apparate to the platform and tell dear Ronniekins that you couldn't come because you refuse to leave my bed. His reaction should be fun to watch," Fred tried.

"After he has walked in on us sharing a bed twice already, I don't think it would come as too much of a shock for him," Hermione replied. Nevertheless, she grudgingly got out of bed. Fred was right. It was time to face the music.

Hermione reluctantly dragged herself into the bathroom and slowly got ready for the day. When she was done, she used her wand to gather her things from the bathroom and dumped them in her trunk. She picked up a few items, which were scattered over the bedroom and had been missed the night before, and threw them inside as well.

Fred had left the bedroom, presumably to get some breakfast, and Hermione was left alone. Before she shut the trunk she put his t-shirt and boxers, which she had been wearing every night, into her trunk as well. Hermione couldn't quite figure out what possessed her to wear his clothes to bed. She just knew that she liked the feeling, and since Fred hadn't said anything to the contrary, she presumed he didn't mind. Nevertheless, she was glad that he hadn't seen her pack them.

She exited the bedroom, and her nostrils picked up the smell of pancakes. Walking into the kitchen, Hermione saw Fred in front of the stove with a frying pan in hand and a stack of pancakes next to him.

"Did you get everything packed?" he asked when Hermione entered the kitchen.

"Yes, all done. You can cook?" Hermione looked at him sceptically.

"Of course I can cook. You *have* seen me do it already," Fred said indignantly. Hermione remembered the other day when they had cooked lunch together and kissed.

"Well, I've never seen you do it all by yourself. No offence, but I know what you can do to toast." Hermione grinned at him.

Before Fred was able to retaliate, George came into the room.

"I'm with you, Hermione. Fred in the kitchen *always* is a cause to worry."

"Ha, ha." Fred finished baking the last pancake and turned off the stove. "That's what I get for slaving away in the kitchen for you guys. But if you don't want to *eat* pancakes, I'll just have to eat them all by myself."

Fred placed the stack of pancakes on the table and put the top one on his plate. After applying liberal amounts of syrup, he started to eat.

"We never said we wouldn't eat them, bro," George said hurriedly.

"Yeah, we wouldn't want to hurt your feelings," Hermione added.

All of them started laughing. Hermione and George sat down at the table and helped themselves to some pancakes, too. They were surprisingly good.

They had a relaxed meal together, but all too soon it was time to leave. Fred retrieved Hermione's trunk from his bedroom, and the three of them left the apartment together. They walked quietly through Diagon Alley...each of them lost in their own thoughts. When they reached the brick wall that posed as barrier between the Muggle and the magical world, they pause for a moment.

"You sure you want me to come, too? I could go back and watch the shop or something," George suggested.

"You promised, George," Hermione pleaded.

Hermione hated how desperate she sounded. She just figured it would be easier to have them both at her side when she got to the platform. There would be enough people there who would be angry with her. It was good to know that the twins were there with her.

"Yeah, well..." George started.

"Chickening out, brother of mine?" Fred asked. "What a shame. I don't even know what you're scared of. No one is angry with you. You're not the one who corrupted our innocent, little Hermione here."

George gave a snort, and Hermione smacked Fred's arm. "I'm not little."

"They are mad at me because I'm not mad at you," George explained.

"Sorry, George, we didn't mean to drag you into all of this." Hermione sounded sad.

"Don't worry. This will blow over eventually," Fred reassured her, and George nodded.

They passed through the passage in the wall and once they were on the other side Apparated to King's Cross.

Platform 9 ¾ was already packed with pupils dragging their oversized trunks after themselves and parents trying to kiss their offspring goodbye. The air was filled with a pandemonium of loud voices, the odd animalistic screams of owls or cats mixed in between.

Hermione instinctively grabbed Fred's hand and looked around for familiar faces. Almost immediately she spotted the bulk of redheads further down the platform. Bill and Charlie had joined their mother as she was bringing her two youngest children to school. Hermione noted that Mr. Weasley wasn't present, probably at the Ministry she thought, but Harry was standing next to them with a sour expression on his face.

Hermione took a deep breath. She desperately hoped there wouldn't be another scene. She hated to fight with the Weasleys, and she definitely didn't want to do it in front of the entire student body.

"Just relax. It's not going to be as bad as you think," Fred assured her, squeezing her hand. She smiled gratefully up at him.

"I hope so."

At that moment Harry saw them. He turned to Bill, Charlie and Mrs. Weasley, and it looked like he was saying good-bye to them. Hermione noticed that Mrs. Weasley only gave him a very tight smile and hugged him stiffly. Her oldest sons didn't seem sorry to see Harry go either. As soon as he left, their attention was back on Ron and Ginny.

Harry walked over to Hermione, Fred and George.

"Hello, I was hoping you would arrive soon," Harry greeted them.

Hermione was looking sad again and opened her mouth to apologize once more for the trouble she was causing.

"I'VE MISSED YOU, TOO, HARRY!" George suddenly exclaimed dramatically, and he actually threw himself at Harry. Harry did his best to fight off the other boy, but was little successful against the energetic twin...he had no choice, but to let himself be hugged. George kept screaming how much he had missed Harry, how his life had been dark without the boy-who-lived-to-light-it and that he did not know how to deal with the impending loss of Harry's presence again.

Fred and Hermione were laughing so hard they had to lean on each other for support.

George's screams drew quite a lot of attention to them. Even the rest of the Weasleys looked over, but they did not join them. Eventually, George stopped his tirade and let go of Harry. Harry was still laughing as he moved to hug Hermione and shake Fred's hand.

"You will excuse me when I don't greet you as enthusiastically as my brother. But frankly I'm just not into hugging wizards that much," Fred said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"That's quite alright," Harry answered. "How are you guys doing?"

"Oh, they are fine," George answered for his brother and Hermione. "Just lovey-dovey. Let me tell you, living with them is torture! Just last night when I came home, I found them on the couch and..."

"George!" Hermione interrupted, her cheeks the vibrant colour of tomatoes.

"Just telling it how it is," George beamed at her.

Harry shook his head. "Good to know." Hermione hid her face on Fred's chest, who just grinned.

George bent down to take Hermione's trunk, which stood next to Fred.

"Come on, Harry, let's put this trunk inside the train. This way we don't have to witness them kissing good-bye and doing all these other nauseatingly sweet things couples insist on doing." Together they dragged Hermione's trunk towards the Hogwarts Express.

"What did the girl pack? Bricks?"

"Probably books."

"Must be half a library." Carrying Hermione's trunk in between them, Harry and George disappeared into the mist surrounding the train and their voices faded.

Fred watched his brother leave with Harry. Hermione was still leaning against him, her face buried in his chest. He closed his arms around her and pressed her body into his.

"I promise, it's not going to be as bad as you think," Fred repeated once more.

"I don't know." Her voice was muffled by his shirt.

"Some Gryffindor you are. Has nobody told you that we're the bravest of all the houses?"

"Maybe I should have been sorted into Hufflepuff."

Fred gave a short laugh. "Certainly not."

Hermione lifted her head and looked up at him. He was taller than her by a few inches, and she had to crane her neck to see his face properly.

"I'm going to miss you."

"Yeah, me too." He bent down and kissed her. So lost were they in their kiss, they didn't notice half the platform was staring at them nor that Ron's face turned puce when he saw them kiss. Only Bill's hand on his arm kept Ron from running over to hit Fred.

"See, that's what I am talking about!" George exclaimed. He and Harry had just returned in time to see the passionate exchange. Fred and Hermione broke apart.

"We should probably board the train. It's about to leave," Harry added.

Hermione nodded. She gave Fred another short kiss, hugged George briefly and, under calls of good-bye, left with Harry.

They got on the train, just as the whistle sounded, and the doors closed behind them.

"I reserved a compartment for us," Harry told her, and Hermione followed him. As they walked through the corridor Hermione noticed the other students whispering and pointing. She was relieved when they reached their destination and went inside. Once the door was closed, Hermione let herself fall onto one of the seats and let out the breath she didn't know she had held. She was glad they had the compartment to themselves and let her eyes fall shut in an effort to blend out all her surroundings.

"You okay?" Hermione opened her eyes again to see Harry sitting across from her and looking worried.

"Yeah. I just don't like all the attention. I don't know how you do it."

"I don't think I'll ever get used to it either," Harry answered. After a short pause he added. "You didn't seem to mind Fred's attention though."

"I don't know what you mean," Hermione said evasively.

"Oh, come on, I know you. You are not that good of an actress. That kiss was real, and if half of the stuff George has told me is true, then you have stopped *acting* like you like Fred a long time ago."

Hermione's cheeks were burning red once more, and she refused to look at Harry's face.

"Am I right?" he prompted.

"I guess. I mean I don't know either. I'm confused. He's..." Hermione looked up at Harry. Taking another deep breath, she lunged into an account of the days since Harry left the flat with Ron.

To say Harry was surprised would be an understatement. He had not expected for Hermione and Fred to fall for each other. They were complete opposites. But opposites attract after all, and as Harry watched Hermione talking with coloured cheeks and glassy eyes, he realised quickly that the new couple made sense. In a twisted sense of way.

"Are you mad at me?" Hermione ended her monologue with a query.

"Why would I be?" Harry was taken aback by her question.

"Because of Ron. I was only supposed to be pretending. And now... I don't know... but, I guess, I'm not anymore."

"Hermione you and Ron are not a couple anymore. You can date whoever you want. And, given that Fred and you have to marry, isn't it great you guys seem to get along so well?"

"I guess. I mean, of course. I'm just sad that everybody else is so angry."

"Me too."

"How was it at the Weasleys'?" Hermione asked, trying to change the subject.

"Not exactly a barrel of laughter," Harry sighed. "They are mad at me because I refuse to be mad at you. Everybody had just figured that one day you and Ron would get together. No one ever put you and Fred together. Ron is hurt, of course, and the others are hurt for him. That's why everybody is so angry."

"He's not going to forgive me, is he?" Hermione asked.

"You need to give it some time," Harry said, though he did not sound very convincing.

The ride passed quickly. Neville stopped by the compartment, as did Lavender and Parvati, but the dark look Harry had deliberately fixed on his face kept them from asking Hermione curious questions.

Once at Hogsmeade station, Hermione guiltily remembered that she was supposed to do Head Girl duties. She quickly jumped off the train, ignored all those whispering voices and helped herding off the people towards the carriages.

Her compulsion of upholding the rules salvaged, she joined Harry and Neville in one of the carriages. They arrived at Hogwarts and followed the throng of pupils going inside the Great Hall.

Hermione only hesitated briefly before passing the doors to the hall.

"It won't be as bad as you think," Harry, who was right behind her, whispered into her ear and gave her an encouraging push. Hermione went forward, resolving that as soon as she woke up the next day, she would go to the library and look up a summoning charm for courage.

So far, Hermione had avoided Ron and Ginny successfully, but there was no hiding when she sat down at the Gryffindor table for dinner.

Ginny shot her a murderous look from where she was sitting with her sixth-year friends on the far end of the table. Thankfully though, the youngest Weasley refrained from making any comment as Hermione walked past her to sit opposite Lavender and Parvati. Harry and Neville slid into seats on either side of her.

Hermione risked a careful glance further down the table, where Ron was sitting with Seamus and Dean. He didn't meet her eyes and stared down the goblet in front of him.

Ron had obviously decided to ignore her. She breathed a sigh of relief.

On the train Hermione had thought up at least 20 different scenarios of how dinner at the Great Hall could go wrong. She had given each of them a rating of one to ten, depending on the level of humiliation and pain, taking into account hurt feelings, embarrassment in front of the whole hall and various other complications.

Being ignored had gotten high marks in the hurt-feelings category, but given the fact that it at least didn't contain any public embarrassment, Ron's current behaviour ranked somewhere in the middle. Hermione sighed once more and started eating the food that had appeared in front of them. Maybe Fred and Harry were right and this wasn't going to be too bad.

"So Hermione, I hear you are sleeping with Fred Weasley now," Lavender commented with all the sensitivity of a blunt axe.

Hermione choked on the food in her mouth.

Hermione was hoping for dinner to be over soon. She had flat out refused to answer any of Lavender's shockingly detailed questions about Hermione's and Fred's sex-life. However, keeping in mind the need to make their relationship public for the sake of gaining the Ministry's approval, Hermione did confirm that she was in fact in a serious relationship with Fred. Lavender was positively elated by the news, and she and Parvati immediately tried to persuade Hermione to dish them all there was to know.

Due to Hermione's unfortunate insistence to keep private things private, Lavender and Parvati were limited to speculating about the on-goings in Fred Weasley's bedroom. They did so with a lot of imagination, attention to detail and most importantly so loudly that half of Gryffindor table was privy to their speculations. Hermione was sure they were attempting to punish her for her refusal to provide the information her two shallow dormmates so desperately craved.

Unable to prevent Parvati and Lavender's ramblings, Hermione kept pushing the food on her plate around, only sporadically looking up to check for the reactions of her classmates. She quickly deduced that most people were surprised to hear about her new relationship. But since Hermione herself had never even so much as considered the possibility of dating Fred Weasley, she could hardly blame everyone else for being surprised now. Nevertheless, Hermione was taken aback by the sheer amount of interest in her newly existing love-life, for she noticed a lot of Gryffindors were secretly listening to Lavender and Parvati or quietly talking among themselves sneaking peeks at Hermione once in a while.

A sidewise glance to Harry revealed that he was once again trying to shut up Parvati and Lavender by staring at them darkly. Unfortunately, the troublesome duo seemed to have reached the conclusion that Harry couldn't harm them in the Great Hall in front of hundreds of witnesses, or else they had decided that gossip this scandalous was worth the risk. Whatever their reasons, they could not be deterred from discussing Fred and Hermione openly.

Ginny was sitting too far away to hear Lavender and Parvati, but Ron was well within earshot, and Hermione was increasingly worried about him. Though Ron pretended not to listen to Parvati and Lavender's ongoing chatter, Hermione noticed the death-grip he had on his fork and that he was only mashing up the food on his plate, not eating more than a few bites.

The fact alone that Ron was refusing to eat was cause enough for Hermione to worry. Additionally, the lack of shouting and violent outbursts, which usually were guaranteed in a situation like this, had Hermione suspecting just how deeply she had hurt her friend's feelings. Hermione instantly felt guilty for causing Ron pain, but at the same time she was angry at the Ministry for putting her into this impossible position in the first place.

At long last dinner was over, and Hermione fled the Great Hall.

She reached the seventh-year dormitories first. Grabbing her nightwear and toiletries, she retreated into the bathroom before Lavender and Parvati had the chance to catch up and continue bothering her. After washing-up and brushing her teeth Hermione changed into Fred's T-shirt and boxers. Wishing she were back in Diagon Alley, Hermione exited the bathroom.

The second the two other girls saw Hermione wearing a pair of man's boxers and a T-shirt whose owner was evident due to the unmistakable imprint of 'Carrot-tops are green, Einstein!', they fired a new battery of indecent questions at Hermione. Hermione had expected as much, but her wish to have the small comfort Fred's clothes provided far outweighed her desire not to encourage Parvati and Lavender even more.

Therefore, Hermione shrugged off all inquiries about her sex-life and got into bed. Before she closed the hangings around her four-poster bed, Hermione calmly informed her dormmates that she was sorry their own love-lives did not suffice to keep their interests, but she would refuse to make up for their lack of personal experience by divulging her own.

It shut Lavender and Parvati up. For the night.

tbc

A/N: I hope you guys liked the chapter. Please take the time and leave me a review.

Thanks go to Katia and Joey for doing the beta.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

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a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 10

Lessons started the day after the arrival of the pupils who had been at home during Christmas. Every-day life returned to normal at Hogwarts, though it held some changes for Hermione. For one thing, Ron kept ignoring her, and Ginny shot hostile glances at Hermione at every opportunity. Hermione was hurt, but saw little chance of reconciliation. Telling them about the impending Marriage Law was not an option, for she feared detection.

Hermione had given the Law a lot of thought over the past days. It was obvious that even though she had come to care about Fred, she would never rationally consider marrying him, or anyone else for that matter, within the next few weeks. Her immediate instinct was to fight the Law at all costs. However, her options were limited. Hermione felt that she had invested too much of her life in the magical world to quit it altogether. Even if the situation with her parents were less complicated, she could not imagine returning to them and living like a Muggle.

Briefly, Hermione had considered leaving Britain. The Quidditch World Cup had shown that magical communities were scattered throughout the world. In fact, back in November when Professor McGonagall had first told her about the Marriage Law, Hermione had gone to the library to do research on the possibility of emigration. Soon two problems had surfaced. One was that, compared to other countries, the British Ministry of Magic actually adopted a very liberal view on the matter of Muggleborns. Hermione was appalled to learn that there were still countries that did not allow the possession of a wand, if the witch or wizard was unable to prove at least three generations of magical ancestry.

A second problem with the issue of emigration arose from Hermione's personal situation. While she had no doubt that Lord Voldemort's influence stretched far over the borders of the British islands, Hermione was aware that the Ministry of Magic lost its jurisdiction outside their own country. Therefore, they would be unable and unwilling to provide protection for her and her family outside of England. The Order of the Phoenix was in need of more members as it was and could not spare their limited resources to protect her abroad. Hermione did not believe for one second that Voldemort would cease to hunt her just because she had left the country. Emigration was not an option.

Therefore, Hermione arrived at the conclusion that marrying Fred was indeed her best bet. And, as she continuously reminded herself, considering the way they had gotten along during her brief stay at the apartment above WWW, there could be worse things than being Mrs. Fred Weasley. This thought kept her afloat during those first few days at Hogwarts, which turned out to be at least as difficult as expected, if not more.

Lavender and Parvati hadn't given up their hunt for sordid details concerning Hermione and Fred's love-life. They had tried everything from whispered questions before they turned in for the night, to cornering Hermione during the meals at the Great Hall and even sending little notes during lessons, which was perhaps the most bothersome approach in Hermione's eyes as it tampered with her concentration in class.

While Hermione did her best to ignore the silly advances of her dorm mates, Ron in turn completely ignored Hermione. It pained her to see how much she had hurt one of her best friends. Hermione's only relief was that Harry obviously did his best to cheer up Ron. She usually saw the two of them together, going for a fly on their brooms in the brisk winter air, talking Quidditch or doing other things guys did.

As relieved as Hermione was that Harry kept Ron company, it left her quite lonely. Ginny still disapproved of Hermione and Fred's relationship and was very vocal about her opinions. Hermione had taken to avoiding Ginny and her sharp tongue at all costs, which was why she spent most of her time in the library, where she was safe from both Lavender and Parvati's inane questions and Ginny's scathing remarks.

The library was the place where Harry found Hermione late on Saturday morning, two weeks after their arrival at Hogwarts. He had both his and Hermione's winter cloaks draped over one arm and looked at Hermione critically.

"Hermione, don't tell me you plan on staying cooped up in the library all day. It's a Hogsmeade weekend!"

Hermione looked up from the enormous tome she was reading. "Harry, don't be daft. Do you expect me to go with Lavender and Parvati?"

"Of course not. You're coming with me," Harry replied, taking the book from Hermione and closing it with a loud thud, causing Madam Pince to look at them disapprovingly.

"No, Harry," Hermione whispered, looking at Madam Pince apologetically, "You should go with Ron."

"I'll catch up with him later. Don't worry."

Harry grabbed Hermione's hands and pulled her out of her sanctuary, not heading her mumbled protests, which turned considerably louder once they were through the library doors.

"Hermione, you've been shutting yourself off for two weeks now. It's not good. Now you're going with me to Hogsmeade, whether you come voluntarily or I have to hex you is up to you." Harry thrust a cloak at the outraged girl and started pushing her towards the castle's entrance doors.

Realising that there was no arguing with him, Hermione grudgingly allowed Harry to pull her out of the castle and down the path to Hogsmeade. They had to fight their way through several inches of snow, which had fallen during the night, and by the time Harry and Hermione reached Hogsmeade, they were both red-nosed and shivering.

"Aren't you glad you came?" Harry asked Hermione with a grin when he noticed her disgruntled expression. By the looks of it, Hermione was already planning her escape, probably wanting to return to the warmth of the Hogwarts library as quickly as possible.

"I don't know why I let you talk me into it," Hermione spat back. She was trudging beside Harry with little appreciation for the snow-covered and picturesque Main Street of Hogsmeade or the enticing shop windows.

"Aw, little Hermione is a spoilsport," came a teasing and very familiar voice from behind Harry and Hermione. Hermione spun on her heel just to come face to face with Fred Weasley.

"Fred!" Hermione exclaimed, surprised, and hugged the redhead. "What are you doing here?"

"Oh, I just happen to be scouting for new premises for the joke shop. George and I might consider branching out to Hogsmeade," Fred answered. "Looks like you have a Hogsmeade visit today. What a coincidence," he added with fake surprise, winking at Harry over Hermione's head.

Hermione turned her head towards Harry without letting go of Fred.

"You knew," she accused.

"Me?" Harry asked in an attempted to sound innocent and failing dreadfully. "Never."

"You did," Hermione said. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she asked Fred.

"Because," he replied, adopting his best teaching voice, which had an uncanny resemblance to Professor Snape, "it would hardly have been a surprise then. I'm not sure whether you are aware of this, little Hermione, but in order to be surprised, the victim has to *not* know about the surprise beforehand."

"Oh, you..." Hermione scoffed and finally let go of Fred in order to be able to punch him in the arm. Lightly, of course. Fred just laughed.

"Well, I'll leave you two to it then," Harry said with an amused twinkle in his eyes. "Have fun." Seeing that his two friends were paying little to no attention to him, Harry shook his head, grinning, and made for the Three Broomsticks to catch up with Ron and the others.

Fred took Hermione's hand and pulled her along with him. They left the busy Main Street and turned to a quieter and smaller road. Hermione looked around. She had never been in that part of the village.

"Where are we going?"

"Do I have to explain the meaning of surprise to you again?" Fred asked with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

Realising that she wouldn't get a straight answer out of him, Hermione let Fred pull her along. Looking around, she realised that they had left the part of the village with all the shops and stores that excited the Hogwarts pupils so much. The small street they were in was mostly dominated by small townhouses, which were obviously designed for living.

Fred stopped at one of the houses and walked down a flight of stairs to the outside entrance of the house's basement.

Before Hermione had the opportunity to ask again where they were going, Fred had opened the door and stepped inside. Following him, Hermione found herself in a small restaurant. Her nose was immediately bombarded with mouth-watering smells and, once Hermione's eyes had adjusted to the somewhat dimmed light of the restaurant, she could see the dozen tables that were arranged in the small room. Altogether, the restaurant had a rather cosy atmosphere.

"I thought we'd go to lunch," Fred explained. "After all, you have agreed to go on a date with me."

Hermione smiled at the grinning Weasley in front of her and let him lead her to one of the few unoccupied tables. Surprisingly, considering its unobtrusive location, the restaurant was quite full.

Once Hermione and Fred had sat down, a wizard named Byron descended upon them. As Fred explained when he made the introductions, Byron was the owner of the restaurant which was simply called *Cratch*. The excited owner jumped up and down in front of their table, surprisingly agile for a man who obviously liked to sample his own food too much. After enquiring which twin exactly was gracing him with his presence, he exclaimed, "Fred, m'boy, you haven't been here in ages. I'm hurt."

Fred unsuccessfully tried to explain that he had to run a business in London and couldn't just pop in for lunch whenever he wanted to because he was working fulltime.

"Nonsense," Byron shouted. "You used to go to school fulltime, too, and that didn't stop you or your brother from coming by regularly."

"Really?" Hermione asked, raising an eyebrow at Fred. He was saved from answering by Byron, who at this point had directed his attention towards Hermione.

"M'dear, I'm simply delighted to welcome a new guest to my little *Cratch*. And such a beautiful guest at that."

Hermione blushed and Byron continued, "I hope you brought a healthy appetite. I think, I know just the thing a lovely lady such as yourself would like to eat. You like ham do you?"

Hermione nodded, but wasn't able to get a word in. Byron babbled on, "I love ham. Only when it's prepared right of course. I prefer seasoning it with..."

A loud crash from another room interrupted Byron's monologue on the best way to prepare ham.

"I must run. There are no limits to the damage my house-elves can do to the kitchen when I'm not there to watch them. Kylie will bring you your drinks," Byron said, gesticulating to a worn-out looking waiter, who was currently busy taking the bill to another couple. Shouting after the departing couple that they better be back within the next week or else, Byron scurried through a small door in the back, which presumably led to the kitchens.

"We don't get to order our food?" Hermione asked Fred once Byron had left.

"No, we don't. Byron prides himself at being able to pick the best food for his guests. But don't worry, everything he serves is delicious. We do get to choose what we want to drink, though," Fred explained and waved for the waiter.

Hermione and Fred left their orders for the drinks with Kylie and talked while they waited for Byron to cook whatever he thought they would like to eat.

After about half an hour, Byron himself served their food. Hermione looked at her plate not entirely sure what was in front of her, but at the very least it smelled delicious. For what it was exactly, Hermione drew a blank, though it looked somewhat like a mix between shepherd's pie and porridge, and obviously contained ham.

"Go on, m'dear, just try it," Byron, who had remained standing by their table, encouraged. Hermione shot Fred a look, who just grinned at her.

"He won't go until he knows you like your food," Fred explained, smiling, and Byron vigorously nodded his head in agreement.

"Okay then..." Hermione picked up her fork and carefully tried whatever it was that lay on her plate. To her utter amazement, it tasted even better than it smelled. Her approval must have been evident on her face, since Byron shouted, "I knew you'd like it!" loud enough for everyone in the restaurant to hear, though the other guest didn't pay them any mind, obviously used to Byron's outbursts. After assuring himself that Fred approved of the food as well, Byron hurried back into the kitchen, leaving his guests to eat in peace.

"He's quite a character," Hermione noted between two bites.

"That he is," Fred agreed. "But he's also the best cook in Hogsmeade."

They enjoyed their food and each other's company. Byron came back once they finished and all but forced them to order dessert. The pudding he served was delicious as well. Once they were finished, Hermione felt as stuffed as after a Hogwarts feast, and when Fred suggested they go for a walk, she readily agreed.

After paying and saying good-bye to Byron, who tearfully made Fred promise to not wait too long until he returned with his beautiful lady friend, they walked around Hogsmeade for a while, talking about everything and nothing. Fred seemed to know Hogsmeade just as well as Hogwarts, and when Hermione asked, he told her how George and he used to explore the village during their third and fourth year at Hogwarts. They had found *the Cratch* by accident. Its existence was a carefully guarded secret of the Hogsmeade citizens, and only insiders knew of its location.

"We should probably warm up in the Three Broomsticks," Fred remarked when both he and Hermione were shivering from the cold. Hermione looked less than thrilled.

"Keep up appearances, you know," Fred added.

"We probably should," Hermione agreed reluctantly, although she sounded little enthusiastic.

"Is it really as bad as you wrote?" Fred asked, referring to the reactions of the pupils and especially that of his siblings, which Hermione had described to him in her letters.

"You'll see," Hermione replied darkly and stepped into the pub.

The moment Fred and Hermione entered the Three Broomsticks, they realized that the better part of the upper years were gathered in the pub. Also, the majority of those assembled seemed to have a keen interest in the newly arrived couple. What's more, Ron and Harry were sitting with Neville, Dean and Seamus at a table right at the entrance.

Determined to avoid yet another scene, Fred quickly grabbed Hermione's hand and hastily pulled her past the boys. Ron, thankfully, maintained the same tactics he had employed since their return to Hogwarts and feigned ignorance. Harry sent a small nod towards them, but stayed beside Ron.

Fred and Hermione bought two Butterbeers from Madam Rosmerta and then turned to look for a table in the packed pub. On their way to find a place to sit, Hermione was careful to avoid Lavender and Parvati, who were occupying a large table with a bunch of girls from their year. She didn't know what she was more afraid of: Parvati and Lavender asking one of their scandalous questions in front of Fred or Fred actually answering them. Hermione decided to save herself the embarrassment and resolutely walked towards an empty table on the far side from Lavender and Parvati's group.

Unfortunately, this table was relatively close to where Ginny was sitting with her friends. Ginny saw the couple immediately, and although Fred and Hermione were unable to understand what she was saying to the girl sitting next to her, Ginny's hateful look towards them gave them an unmistakable message.

Once they reached a small, empty table Fred sat heavily down in his chair.

"I know why Ron is acting the way he is. Can't exactly blame him; he's been in love with you for ages. But I really didn't expect Ginny to behave like such a bitch," he complained.

"She's just upset," Hermione explained, sitting down as well.

"About what? After all, I'm her brother, too. Why does she have to side with Ron?"

"This isn't about you and me," Hermione assured soothingly, since Fred actually looked hurt.

"It's not?" Fred looked perplexed. "Then what the hell is she so upset about?"

"Harry," Hermione replied simply.

"She is upset about Harry because you and I are dating?" Fred asked, confused.

"In a manner of speaking." Seeing Fred's baffled face, she added, "I didn't want to be with Ron because I didn't want a relationship during such dangerous times. It was basically the same reason Harry gave Ginny when he broke it off with her. Now I found someone else and, I think, Ginny is subconsciously afraid that Harry will do the same. That's why she is feeling so angry on Ron's behalf."

"Why can't she just be angry at Harry then?" Fred asked, looking among Harry, Ginny and Hermione, mystified.

"It doesn't work that way."

"Witches!" Fred mumbled into his Butterbeer, but the look he sent his sister was less resentful.

Hermione and Fred sipped their drinks, trying to ignore the attention they were receiving from the young witches and wizards around them. They resumed their easy talk from earlier, and with time the interest of mostly everyone drifted back to their own conversations. Ginny kept glancing disdainfully at them once in a while, and Hermione noticed that Ron seemed to have somehow deflated and obviously lost all the interest in the talk around him. But other than that, Fred and Hermione were able to enjoy the rest of their time together.

All too soon, the day came to an end, and the pupils of Hogwarts left the Three Broomsticks in droves.

"I should probably go, too," Hermione finally said when most of the students had already left.

"Yeah, probably," Fred agreed reluctantly, and both of them got up from the table, donned their winter wear and walked out of the pub. Outside, the temperature had dropped considerably since the sun had already begun to set. Fred looked up to the semi-dark sky.

"You probably shouldn't go back alone," Fred said worriedly.

Hermione was all set to give him the 'I'm a big girl and can take care of myself'-speech, but her common sense prevailed. It really wouldn't be smart to traipse around in the dark alone during times like these.

"I'll find Lavender or Parvati and go up with them," she said instead, but her scrunched up nose showed clearly how much she was looking forward to a walk with the girls.

However, she was saved from that particular pleasure, as Harry was standing not far from the Three Broomsticks, clearly waiting to accompany her back. Hermione sent him a thankful smile and turned to Fred to say goodbye.

Fred immediately pulled Hermione towards him and kissed her thoroughly. Neither one of them noticed the remaining pupils staring at them, and saying that this kiss was just for show would be an outright lie. It was for their benefit alone. When they came up for air, they stayed close together just looking at each other. However, Fred and Hermione weren't willing to admit yet that they had stopped merely pretending to be a couple sometime ago, and anyway, it wasn't the place to have this conversation.

So Fred kissed Hermione briefly on the lips once more and gave her a wry smile.

"You better go. Harry's waiting. Wouldn't want him to freeze off vital body parts. The-boy-who-lived-to-lose-his... hand-to-frostbite just doesn't have the same ring."

Hermione gave a short laugh, hugged Fred one last time, and shaking her head, walked over to Harry. Fred watched the two of them leave before Apparating back to London.

Hermione trudged alongside Harry back to the castle. In her mind, she replayed the afternoon she had spent with Fred, a goofy smile on her face.

"Oh, boy," Harry suddenly said. Hermione turned to her best friend and saw him grinning at her.

"What?" she asked accusingly and stopped walking.

"You've got it bad." Harry grinned even more and continued his way to Hogwarts.

Hermione looked at him perplexed for a few seconds, then hurried to catch up.

"You have no idea what you're talking about."

Harry just kept grinning.

tbc

a/n: I hope you liked the chapter. Reviews are love.

As always, thanks go to my two awesome betas, Joey and Katia.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

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a/n: AU since DH.

Chapter 11

The days after the Hogsmeade weekend passed quickly for Hermione. She concentrated on her classes, and whenever the ongoing hostilities from Ron and especially Ginny became too much, she thought back to the day she had spent with Fred. Thoughts about him never failed to make her smile, and it made the situation in the Gryffindor common-room and during the meals so much more bearable.

On Thursday the time for the Ministry had finally come to announce their new Marriage Law Act.

To those very few already expecting the law, signs had been clear that the Ministry was rallying to drop this bomb on its community. Hermione had been appalled to notice the increasing propaganda against Squibs. Articles were published not only in the *Daily Prophet*, but in every major wizarding newspaper and magazine (the *Quibbler* being the one notable exception), warning against the supposedly rising ratio of Squibs to wizards and the danger emanating from such an outrageous development.

Hermione could only snort disgustedly at each new article she read on the front page of the *Prophet* and hoped that at least the majority of the witches and wizards would see the Ministry's Anti-Squib campaign for what it really was: a pathetic decoy from their inability to defeat Voldemort once and for all. Alas, it seemed so far that a lot of her fellow students were actually inclined to buy into the lies of the Ministry. Hermione had written an agitated letter to Fred only three days ago, telling him about a cowardly attack on Filch.

Despite the fact that the current caretaker of Hogwarts wasn't one of her favourite people by a long shot, Hermione had been dismayed to learn that a small group of students had broken into Filch's office, demolished it completely and smeared highly literary messages like "Squibs suck" on the walls. The professors had yet to find the ones responsible for the deed and punish them accordingly.

Fred's answer to Hermione's letter had arrived the day before. It was the current political climate that gave significance to the fact that even Fred condemned the act of vandalism against Filch. According to him, the mood in London was similar to the one at Hogwarts, and people really seemed to believe 'the humongous load of Hippogriff crap our beloved Ministry has chosen to unload on its devoted sheep'. Apparently the magical community didn't mind being purposefully misled as long as it meant they didn't have to worry about Voldemort for a little bit. Fred was as disgusted as Hermione.

Hermione had gone to breakfast early, as had become her habit, in order to avoid the crowds. Therefore, she was already done with her food and only waiting for the arrival of the post owls, in hope of another letter from Fred, when it happened.

Looking restlessly in the direction where the owls generally entered, Hermione was among the first to notice the unusually large amount of owls flying into the Great Hall. Every student attending the seventh year and even some sixth years received an owl, carrying a purple pamphlet with the Ministry's crest. Hermione took hers from a ghastly looking eagle owl.

The Ministry had kept the upcoming Marriage Law Act a secret in order to avoid protests and criticism even before the Act was passed. In a massive effort, it now had to inform the wizarding community all at once. To achieve this feat, the Ministry was sending out an owl to every witch and wizard subject to the new law as well as publishing the Act in every major wizarding newspaper.

Hermione opened the pamphlet and read:

Marriage Law Act

The Ministry of Magic is proud to announce this new piece of legislation, which will eradicate the much feared rise of the Squib ration among the wizarding community. Effective immediately, the following laws will govern the matrimonial relationships between witches and wizards.

1. ... (1) A marriage hereafter contracted between a witch and a wizard shall only be valid if one of the party is of Muggle descent and the other of pureblood.
(2) In the foregoing and following subsections the word 'pureblood' applies equally to descendants of pure and of half blood.
2. ... (1) The Ministry of Magic shall have the power to bond any Muggleborn between the age of 17 and 35 with a pureblood willing to enter the marital status.
(2) Any pureblood wishing to petition for the hand of a Muggleborn shall apply to the Registrar of the Ministry of Magic.
(3) Marriage between purebloods may only be permitted under exceptional circumstances, and if the Registrar of the Ministry of Magic grants special permission.
(4) A Muggleborn may evade the Ministry's procurement if the Muggleborn is already involved in a relationship with a pureblood and intending to marry.
(5) Couples as described in the subsections 3 and 4 have to give notice of their established relationship to the Registrar of the Ministry of Magic.
3. ... (1) A registrar to whom an established relationship notice is given may require the witch or wizard giving the notice to provide him with specified evidence relating to the witch and wizard intending to be married.
(2) Such a requirement may be imposed at any time on or after the giving of the marriage notice but before the registrar issues the Ministry approval.
(3) In paragraph (1) "specified evidence", in relation to a witch or wizard, means such evidence of that couple's...
(a) names and surnames; (b) ages; (c) Blood Status; and (d) details regarding their ongoing relationship as well as the ability to support a family, as may be specified in guidance issued by the Registrar General.
4. ... (1) After the Muggleborn receives a marriage notice from the Ministry, the marriage shall be executed within the following 60 days.
(2) In the case of an established relationship, the marriage shall be executed within 30 days after the Ministry's approval described under section 3.
5. ... (1) Any witch or wizard unwilling to abide the foregoing law will be charged with an aggravated offence and will be sentenced to return their wand to the Ministry and to dissociate from the Wizarding Community.

Hermione read the pamphlet twice. Although she had already known about the impending act, she was still shocked to see it in writing. Up to this moment, there had always been a tiny piece of naïve hope within her that the Act would not get passed.

"I don't get it," Lavender said, who was sitting across Hermione and reading the pamphlet as well. "What does it mean?"

"It means," Hermione explained, "that the Ministry can force any Muggleborn into a marriage with a pureblood who has applied for the Muggleborn, unless the Muggleborn is already in a relationship with another pureblood, who is willing to get married."

Lavender looked at her dumbfounded. "Can they do that?"

"Apparently," Hermione spat, once more disgusted with the body that was meant to govern the witches and wizards in Britain to the best of its abilities.

The noise in the Great Hall increased a thousand fold as more and more students became aware of the Ministry's new legislation and its consequences. Hermione witnessed a myriad of different reactions, from disbelieving laughter, to spontaneous proposals of marriage, to hysteric cries. Hermione herself kept her head down, pretending to study the pamphlet in front of her and trying not to give away her previous knowledge of the Law.

Harry joined Hermione a little while later. One quick glance at his face confirmed that he, too, was trying his best to appear surprised and justifiably angered, the latter expression requiring considerably less acting skills than the first.

None of the upper years even bothered to go to class that morning as they all remained in the Hall, discussing this unexpected turn of events. In a brief flare of sarcasm, Hermione mentally applauded the Ministry for achieving their goal of diverting attention from Voldemort. For the first time in a very long period He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named and his Death Eaters were not regarded as newsworthy.

Finally, Headmistress McGonagall announced that all classes would be suspended for the day, so everyone could become adapted to the new situation. Her facial expression, which suggested strongly that she had just bitten into a lemon, clearly showed what she thought of this 'new situation.' Most of the teachers seemed to share her feelings concerning the Law. They could be seen at the high table, talking to one another sombrely, shaking their heads from time to time.

Hermione remained at the Gryffindor table, listening to the conversations around her. A few of her classmates, Lavender and Parvati in the lead, had asked her what she planned to do. Hermione gave them a noncommittal answer, claiming she had to write to Fred first, before she could say anything. Once or twice Hermione noticed Ginny looking shrewdly at her from her position at the other end of the Gryffindor table. But as to how exactly interpret Ginny's looks, Hermione drew a blank.

Altogether, she was taken a little aback at the reactions of her fellow students. As expected, most of them didn't approve of the Marriage Law, with the few exceptions of those people stupid enough to seriously buy into the Ministry's Anti-Squib campaign. However, instead of discussing how to possibly get rid of the Marriage Law, which would have been Hermione's first choice of action, most students had already moved a step further and were deliberating future husbands or wives.

For once, Hermione felt like she didn't belong in Hogwarts, for the difference between a Muggle upbringing and the magic world could not have been any more obvious than on this Thursday. Whereas every fibre of her being screamed that this Marriage Law was immoral and a clear violation of basic human rights, most students with a magical parentage seemed to be of the opinion that the Ministry of Magic had every right to meddle into the personal affairs of each and every wizard. Hermione felt desolated.

As the Headmistress announced that those students who needed to talk to their parents or prospective spouses could return home on Friday afternoon via the Floo network, Hermione excused herself and went to the Owlery to send a letter to Fred.

Friday afternoon had Hermione impatiently standing in a long line in front of Headmistress McGonagall's office, clutching a small over-night bag and waiting to Floo to the apartment above WWW. The better part of the older students was using this opportunity to Floo home to consult their parents or discuss the Marriage Law with their respective girlfriend/boyfriend.

The mood of those waiting in line was subdued bordering on anxious. Hermione on the other hand found she was inappropriately giddy. She couldn't help herself; she was happy to see Fred again. So she kept her head down hiding between her bushy hair, lest anyone see her actually smiling.

Progress was slow, and Hermione had to wait quite some time until she finally reached Professor McGonagall's office. Inside, she found not only the Headmistress but also Professors Sprout and Flitwick. Though nobody said it out loud, Hermione knew that the teachers were there to make sure that the opened Floo channel didn't pose a threat to Hogwarts' security.

"Come in, Miss Granger," Professor McGonagall greeted Hermione when it was her turn. Hermione stepped through the door and just saw Hannah Abbot disappearing into the emerald flames of the fireplace.

"Please remember your timeslot to return on Sunday evening. We will have a lot of students returning through this fireplace, and we're trying to avoid it getting too crowded," the Headmistress primly explained in a voice that clearly portrayed that she had given these instructions countless times already that day.

"Just take some powder and off you go. Good luck."

Hermione took a pinch of Floo Powder from a large bowl on Professor McGonagall's desk, said good-bye to the Professors and Flooded out of Hogwarts. After a bumpy but remarkably short ride through the Floo network, Hermione stepped, slightly stumbling, out of the fireplace of Fred and George's apartment. Fred was waiting for her on the couch and upon seeing Hermione immediately leaped up to greet her.

"Finally. What took you so long?" he asked, his question muffled, because he was hugging her at the same time.

Hermione allowed herself a few moments to enjoy Fred's embrace before she answered, knowing that this could only lead to more serious discussions and less hugging.

"There was a terribly long line in front of Professor McGonagall's office. It seems that almost everyone our age Flooded home today. Everybody was very nervous."

Fred indeed let go of Hermione and sat back on the couch. Hermione remained standing.

"That was to be expected, wasn't it?" Fred asked. "After all, we are pretty much the only ones who had a warning that this was coming. I bet there are a lot of people right now trying to figure out whether they want to marry their partner or try their luck with the Ministries match-making. Wouldn't want to be a Muggleborn right now."

"Yeah..." Hermione looked at her shoes, suddenly ill at ease in Fred's living-room.

"Uh, sorry Hermione," Fred said after an awkward pause. "Didn't mean you, of course... I mean... of course, it'd be better if you weren't... ah, hell, forget I said anything."

Fred shot her a lopsided smile, leaning back on the couch and stuffing his hands into his pockets.

Hermione took a deep breath to steady herself and mumbled, "Fred, I know you're only doing the Order a favour, you don't really have to..."

"Don't be stupid, Hermione," Fred interrupted. "Look... will you sit down? It's kind of difficult to have this discussion while you're still standing there ready to bolt."

Hermione did as he asked and took a seat next to Fred on the couch. However, she was still studying her shoes intently.

"Look, we both know that we will have to get married. You would be in a lot of danger if we didn't. But I want you to know... I'm not only doing this because I have to. I mean, obviously without the Law I would be asking you out on another date, not proposing marriage... but... it's not so bad, isn't it?"

Hermione sat in stunned silence, mulling things over. Fred's words were almost exactly mirroring her own thoughts. She was forced to marry Fred in order to be safe; yet, as alien as that concept seemed, it wasn't so bad either.

Hermione looked up for the first time and saw Fred looking at her searchingly. Not sure what she should say, for really there were no words to express her conflicted feelings, Hermione slowly leaned towards him instead and brushed a light kiss on his lips.

"No, it's not," she murmured softly against his lips and then leaned in for a second kiss. Fred reached for Hermione and pulled her into his lap, never breaking their kiss. For the moment they just enjoyed each other.

Finally, Hermione ended the kiss, let out a sigh and nestled her head into the crook of Fred's neck. Fred tightened his hold of her.

"What are we going to do now?" Hermione asked.

"I suppose we'll have to go to the Ministry tomorrow. See the registrar about this established relationship business."

"Right," Hermione spat. "I've never seen a more ridiculous law."

"You clearly haven't had to manage a wizarding company. You wouldn't believe how many ridiculous laws the Ministry has come up with already. Did you know, for example, that you are not allowed to greet potential customers standing on your hands, holding your wand with your toes? Apparently the Ministry is worried about accidental magic blemishing the consumer/salesman relationship. Bunch of spoilsports!"

Hermione smiled against his neck. "Nope, didn't know that."

"And you're supposed to be smart."

At that point they heard the apartment door open, and a few moments later, George was coming into the living-room, one hand clasp over his eyes, the other one feeling ahead for any obstacles.

"Don't look," Fred advised, "we're having naked, sweaty sex on the rug in front of the fireplace."

"Really?" George asked, immediately dropping his hands and looking at the rug expectantly.

"No, of course not," Hermione admonished.

"Well, you can always hope for the future," Fred told George consolingly, as his twin plopped down into an armchair opposite the couch Hermione and Fred were occupying.

"Have you decided what to do about the Law?" George asked casually, eyeing the couple in front of him carefully.

Hermione and Fred quickly looked at each other, an action that didn't go unnoticed by George. Then Fred announced, "We're getting married."

George smiled. He had been expecting as much. "Congratulations."

The three of them had a small celebration dinner in the kitchen of the twins' apartment. They discussed the Law and its consequences till late into the evening, until they were all tired and Fred and Hermione bade George, who went into his own room, good-night.

Hermione went to fetch her small overnight bag, which she had dropped in the living room earlier, while Fred changed in the bathroom. Then they switched places, and Fred waited for Hermione while she put on her night things. While he waited, Fred was thinking about the day he had had, a cluster of conflicted thoughts running through his mind.

He was still sitting on the edge of his bed, deep in contemplation, when Hermione exited the bathroom. She was once more wearing Fred's 'Carrot Tops Are Green, Einstein!' t-shirt and his boxer shorts.

"You know, I've been looking for those," Fred remarked upon seeing her, his teasing grin masking the much more complicated feelings that stirred inside him whenever he saw her wearing his clothes.

"They look much better on me than on you anyways," Hermione teased right back and came to sit next to him on the foot of the bed. The room was silent for a few moments while both of them tried to come to grips with their situation. So much had changed in such a short time.

Fred was the one who finally broke their silence. "We should probably go to sleep. It's better to get to the Ministry early. It's bound to be pact."

Hermione nodded her consent, but when she turned to look at Fred to say goodnight, she found him staring at her, the oddest look on his face. She opened her mouth to speak, although later Hermione could not have said what it was that she had wanted to say. Before she had the chance to even get a word out, Fred leaned in and kissed her.

The kiss was slow and deliberate, and neither of them made a move to increase their physical contact. They just sat next to each other on the bed, bodies turned towards one another, lips locked in a sweet kiss. The need to breathe finally forced them apart, but still they remained sitting next to each other, not touching, nevertheless emotionally closer than they had ever been.

Eventually, Fred broke the silence. "Hermione, why do you keep wearing my clothes?" he asked, tugging slightly at the hem of the shirt in question.

Fred noticed the faint blush colouring Hermione's cheeks, though whether it was due to their kissing or his question Fred could not tell.

"They are comfortable," Hermione finally answered, and in a much softer voice she admitted, "I didn't feel so alone when I wore them at Hogwarts."

Something stirred inside of Fred. He didn't know why, but he was incredibly moved by Hermione's words. Hermione was looking shyly away, surprised by the truthfulness and underlying meaning of her admission. Fred tugged a stray curl behind her ear, watching her profile and patiently waited until she was ready to look at him once more. When Hermione did turn towards him, Fred cradled her face in both his hands and kissed her, conveying all their conflicted, verbally inexpressible emotions.

There were no barriers left between them that night, which became the first they truly spent *together*. Much later, they lay in each other's arms, fully contented, and this time Professor Snape didn't get the chance to jump a single cauldron before Fred fell into a peaceful and satisfied slumber.

tbc

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 of 12

FWHG My take on the marriage law, but I created a loophole. A story about the beginning of Fred and Hermione's relationship and their struggle to be accepted by their friends and families. Will they be able to prove that opposites do attract?

Disclaimer: JKR owns everything, and I don't make any money with this story. The idea of the Marriage Law originated at wikt, I believe. I'm just borrowing.

A/N: This story is AU since DH.

Chapter 12

Despite the late night, Hermione awoke early the next morning. She found herself in her customary position on Fred's chest, with the fundamental difference of not feeling the shirt he had worn to bed underneath her cheek, but bare flesh.

At the same time as awareness and memories came rushing back to Hermione, her thoughts and doubts returned. As silently as possible, Hermione extracted herself from Fred's embrace and, carefully checking he was still fast asleep, quietly made her way into the bathroom.

Not daring to cast a look in the mirror, Hermione stepped into the shower and turned the hot water on. Standing underneath the spray, she let her thoughts go back to the previous night. She meant to think about it rationally, but details kept creeping up, distracting her from any demure line of thought. Bottom line, she had enjoyed the previous night's activities a lot.

But Hermione's analytical and down-to-earth personality didn't allow her to bask in the afterglow for long. Just as short and pragmatic as her shower was, her thinking soon returned to the problem at hand: Hermione's feelings towards Fred. The poor girl was simply overwhelmed by their sheer existence, never having expected to fall for someone so unlike her own character.

But as she was towelling off and put on a fresh set of clothes, Hermione mused that having feelings for Fred really wasn't much of a problem. After all, they *were* getting married.

Seating herself on the closed toilet seat, Hermione allowed herself the time to properly analyse their situation from top to bottom. However, she was unable to achieve any other results than the fact that, as unorthodox as their relationship was, they were starting to care for each other. For Hermione was sure that Fred was feeling similarly to her, and the fact that they expressed those feelings could surely not be a bad thing.

Smoothing down her clothing, Hermione finally did look into the mirror and found that she looked just as familiar as the day before, bushy hair and all. Taking her customary deep breath to relax herself, she opened the door and stepped outside the bathroom. Fred was awake by now and reading the *Prophet* in bed.

"Morning," she offered tentatively.

"Morning," Fred replied, putting the paper aside. "So what's the verdict?"

"Excuse me?" Hermione asked, confused.

"You've just spent an hour in that bathroom, no doubt thinking about last night and weighing the pros and cons. I wanna know what you have decided," Fred explained good-naturedly, a small smile playing on his lips.

Hermione was once more surprised at his ability to read her like an open book, but she also saw the nervousness that lingered right behind the carefree exterior he had put up. She slowly made her way towards the bed and sat down beside Fred, ignoring, for now, the fact that she very well knew he was naked underneath the sheets.

"I think... that this is all moving very fast... and that I had never expected to... develop feelings for you. I did, though, and I don't regret sleeping with you," Hermione explained truthfully. Fred looked relieved at her words.

"Good," Fred grinned playfully. "Does that mean we can do it again?"

Fred tugged at her arm and pulled her on top of him. Hermione smiled into his kiss.

"We need to get to the Ministry."

"The Ministry isn't going anywhere," Fred whispered and successfully distracted Hermione by running his hands up and down her spine.

"It's not like we have an appointment," he mumbled before burrowing one of his hands in Hermione's unruly hair and deepening their kiss. Hermione returned his kiss passionately, enjoying the feel of Fred's strong body underneath her.

Until they heard a sharp knock on the door, and George poked his head inside.

"Oi, are you two at it again? Shouldn't you be at the Ministry?"

Hermione groaned and buried her face in Fred's chest, embarrassed. Fred threw a pillow in the general direction of the door. George successfully ducked the airborne cushion and continued unperturbed, "I'll open the shop now. You two should get a move on." Shaking his head, George left the room before any more feathered missiles could threaten his well-being.

Alone once more, Hermione didn't move from her spot on top of Fred, her cheek comfortably resting on his bare chest, listening to his heartbeat.

"We're confusing the hell out of him," Fred finally broke the quiet.

"George?" Hermione asked.

"I think yesterday he suspected there was something going on between us because of the Marriage Law, as a front, almost. Today he finds us like this. Poor chap probably doesn't know what to think anymore." Hermione noted Fred didn't sound too apologetic.

"Fred, have you thought about just telling him?" Hermione asked, raising her head so she could look at his face. "I mean, I've got Harry to talk to. He knows. I'd understand if you want to tell George."

"Maybe," Fred answered evasively. "But at this point I'm afraid he's going to be mad because I didn't tell him upfront." Before Hermione had a chance to reply, Fred sat up, taking her with him. "We should really get going."

After a quick breakfast, Hermione and Fred went to the Ministry of Magic. They Floo'd in together, Fred hugging Hermione tightly from behind so they wouldn't get jostled against each other during the ride. Once they reached one of the many gilded fireplaces in the Atrium, Fred let go of Hermione's waist, taking her hand instead.

They made their way over to the security desk. When they passed the Fountain of Brethren, Hermione involuntarily shuddered, remembering that one night when she had been at the Ministry with Harry, Ron, Ginny, Neville and Luna. Even though she hadn't seen the fight between Voldemort and Dumbledore, she had passed the Atrium when she had been escorted back to Hogwarts. It had been utterly demolished.

Evidently the Fountain of Brethren had since been restored, although Hermione still noticed some cracks and dents, and the jet of water flying from the wizard's wand seemed to be somewhat irregular. It gave her an odd sense of satisfaction to see that the Ministry hadn't been able to cover up all the remnants of Voldemort's visit. *Serves them right.*

Fred and Hermione weren't the only ones who made their way over to the security desks, where three Ministry employees were now stationed. Several other witches and wizards, mostly couples, walked over from the fireplaces, and others joined from the direction of the visitors' entrance. Small lines were forming in front of each desk as people anxiously waited to be searched and have their wands registered.

"Bloody Marriage Law," the badly shaven Ministry employee examining Hermione's wand grunted disagreeably. "Haven't even read the *Prophet* yet."

After they had been properly searched, registered and provided with visitor's badges, Fred and Hermione joined the stream of witches and wizards walking through the golden gates and towards the lifts. Hermione was just about to ask Fred whether he knew on which floor the registrar's office would be, but closed her mouth again the moment she took a look at the lifts. There were huge signs floating above each elevator. Glittering purple letters read *Registrar's office: Level 2.*

"Somehow I doubt we'll be the only ones getting off at level two," Fred muttered when they joined a rather long queue in front of the elevators.

It took several minutes until it was their turn to enter through the golden gates and step into one of the elevators. People were standing as close as sardines, and every time someone wanted to get off at one of the lower levels, half the people in the elevator had to step out to let them through. By the time Hermione and Fred, together with several other witches and wizards, arrived at level two, Fred was wearing a scowl and Hermione was chewing her lip anxiously.

They followed the floating purple arrows pointing them towards the registrar's office, though the direction signs were completely unnecessary, since they could have just walked towards the source of all the voices. Once they stepped through a set of large oak doors, Hermione and Fred stood in a large corridor already half-filled with waiting couples. At the end of the corridor, there was another set of oak doors, and above the heavy frame floated a purple number. Hermione heard a bell chime, and the glittering number changed from 132 to 133. A wizard in flaming red robes and a tiny witch, a couple by the looks of it, went inside the office, a small number 133 floating above their heads as well.

"Should've gotten up even earlier," Fred remarked, tapping a small purple box near the door they had just come through. A beam of purple light shot out of the box, and a glittering 564 appeared above Fred's head. He groaned.

They got comfortable on the floor of the corridor, as some early birds had long ago taken the few available seats, and waited. Bored and thoroughly regretting not taking a

book, Hermione looked around the room. Most couples looked about as anxious and nervous as she felt, the Marriage Law having put them all in an awkward position. A few wizards were looking angry. Hermione imagined they were there to give the registrar a piece of their mind. Some looked absolutely besotted with their partners, and others again seemed to feel the desperate need to convince the other people in the hallway that they were indeed a couple by subjecting everybody in their close vicinity to a private show. Hermione redirected her gaze to the floor when the witch sitting against the opposite wall of the corridor started crawling onto her fiancé's lap.

"At least the Ministry is kind enough to provide entertainment while we wait," Fred remarked with a chuckle. Hermione elbowed him in the ribs, and the witch opposite of them glared from her position on her fiancé's lap.

By the time number 563 floated above the oak doors, Hermione herself was lying with her head in Fred's lap, cushioned by his winter cloak, having just spent the last half hour counting the cracks in the ceiling.

They slowly got up, dusted themselves off and walked through the crowded corridor towards the entrance to the office. While Fred restlessly watched the glittering number, willing it to change to 564, Hermione looked at the polished brass plaque on the door reading:

Department for the Regulation of Wizarding Marriages

Head Registrar: Dolores J. Umbridge.

"Noooo," Hermione groaned, just as the number changed. Fred also had the opportunity to read the plaque before the doors opened and they had no choice other than to go through. Looking seriously worried for the first time, Fred took Hermione's hand, and together they entered the registrar's office.

They stood in a large room with several desks on either side. More than a dozen Ministry employed witches and wizards were working at the registrar's office, answering owl post, filling in paperwork and mastering the gigantic administrative feat in general that had resulted from the release of the Marriage Law.

At the far end of the room, a desk twice the size of everyone else's stood on a small pedestal. Hermione didn't need to read the polished name plaque to know it was Umbridge's desk. Several grotesque porcelain figurines, loosely resembling playing kittens, on its surface attested to that.

Umbridge herself sat on a pink upholstered chair behind the desk, her hands folded neatly in front of her, a patronizing smile contorting her unpleasant features. Like a gigantic toad she was presiding over her polliwogs. Reluctantly, Fred and Hermione walked up to her.

"Er...good morning," Hermione started awkwardly. "We're here because of the Marriage Law."

"Tut, tut, my dear. Everyone is here because of that," Umbridge replied sweetly. "What exactly do you want?"

"We've come to be exempted from the Ministry's choosing process. We, that is Fred and I, want to get married," Hermione further explained. Both she and Fred were still standing awkwardly in front of Umbridge's desk, as the newly appointed registrar hadn't offered them a seat.

"I see," Umbridge chirped. "Are you aware that the Ministry is in the position to ask detailed questions before administrating a marriage accreditation?"

"Yes, we've read the pamphlet." Again Hermione was the one to answer.

"Well then," Umbridge said. "Take a seat."

Relieved that the first hurdle was taken and Umbridge hadn't thrown them out right away, Hermione and Fred sat down and prepared themselves for Umbridge's questions. Just when the registrar wanted to begin her enquiry, another person arrived at the desk, taking a vacated seat at Umbridge's side.

"All files are in order, Dolores," the newly arrived wizard said before taking his quill, pointedly ignoring Hermione and Fred.

"Very well. Percy Weasley is going to protocol our meeting and assist me in finding my decision," Umbridge explained before starting her questionnaire.

"Names please."

Hermione stated both their names while Fred was busy staring at his older brother, who in turn busied himself with writing down their names as if he hadn't known them all along.

"Ages?" Umbridge continued, seemingly unaware of the tension surrounding her desk.

"Blood Status?"

"When did this relationship start?"

Hermione answered all questions while Fred silently sat beside her.

"Do you wish to get married within the next thirty days?" Umbridge asked sweetly, looking at Fred and Hermione as if she was expecting them to decline.

"Yes, we do," Hermione answered, adopting Umbridge's saccharine tone and giving her a broad smile for good measure. Fred managed a smile as well, which didn't falter when his brother acknowledged his presence for the first time by coughing disapprovingly.

"You believe your relationship is serious enough to progress into the marital state?" Umbridge continued unfazed.

Hermione once again answered affirmatively.

"Explain why!" Umbridge demanded, looking at them expectantly.

"Er..." Hermione faltered.

"Unsure about their relationship," Percy said out loud while writing the corresponding note into the protocol. Umbridge nodded approvingly. Hermione frowned.

"We have very serious feelings for each other and wish to spend the rest of our lives together," Fred spat, speaking up for the first time.

"Is that so?" Umbridge asked. "And you believe your own choice in a partner is going to be more prudent than the match the Ministry can provide for you?"

Fred's face clearly said, 'I wouldn't even trust the Ministry to choose my socks for me, let alone a lifelong companion.' Out loud, he said, "I believe Hermione is the one for me, and nobody else would be better."

Umbridge looked disappointed while Percy once again coughed disapprovingly.

"I'm still not convinced your relationship is serious enough," Umbridge said. "You say you've been together since last summer. Are there any witnesses for that?"

"No," Hermione supplied. "We've only told our families about us this Christmas."

"And they approve?"

"Not exactly. They are kind of divided in their opinion." Which wasn't a lie, as Hermione reasoned with herself. Although George currently was the only family member waving the 'I support Fred and Hermione' banner, he nevertheless had taken their side.

Umbridge tutted critically, but dropped that particular line of questioning.

"Are you able to support a family?" she asked Fred instead.

"Yes. I run a very successful business with my brother," Fred supplied.

"What kind of business?" Umbridge prompted.

"A joke shop," Fred said.

Umbridge and Percy managed to tut simultaneously.

"The Ministry is a very good customer of ours," Fred continued unfazed, though Hermione could see that he was gripping the arms of his chair so tightly his knuckles had turned white. She covered one of his hands with one of her own to get him to relax. Percy sneered at them, and Fred stiffened even more.

"Well then," Umbridge cleared her throat, "if the Ministry buys your products..."

Fred had difficulties to suppress a smirk.

"I'm still reluctant to approve your request. I'll have you know that already several people have voiced their interest in Miss Granger's hand in marriage." Hermione gasped and Umbridge delighted in her shock. "Though I can't quite see the attraction," she added nastily, "all applicants are outstanding members of the community."

"I also have to add, that as a brother to Mr. Weasley, I have considerable doubts as to his ability to support a family, not so much economically, but emotionally. He seems to be lacking stability and sense of responsibility," Percy said importantly.

Hermione tightened her grip on Fred's hand before hissing, "How would you know? You haven't had any contact with your family in years." Percy reddened, whether in anger or embarrassment Hermione couldn't tell, and returned his gaze to the protocol.

"Yes, yes, a lot of evidence to suggest this is not a relationship destined to be permanent." Umbridge seemed positively delighted.

"That's not true," Hermione insisted, raising her voice slightly. The employees of the registrar's office were starting to eavesdrop on their conversation. "Fred and I are very serious about each other."

"Maybe, maybe," Umbridge chirped once more and consulted the questionnaire in front of her. "Have there been any sexual relations?" she asked bluntly.

Hermione could only stare at her open mouthed.

"Not that this is any of your business," Fred answered, "but yes."

Percy gave his loudest cough yet.

"The Ministry has to take every aspect into account when making its decision," Umbridge justified her question.

"Old spinster," Fred muttered under his breath, though Hermione was the only one who could hear him.

Umbridge consulted the papers in front of her again. "I really ought to decline this request, for the good of the Ministry..." she muttered, taking care that everyone in the room could hear her.

"You listen to me," Hermione suddenly snapped. Leaning halfway over Umbridge's desk, she purposefully invaded the toad's personal space and continued threateningly, "I don't care how many personal questions you ask, Fred and I are a couple, and we want to get married. Now you can either approve or we're going straight to the Wizengamot and file a complaint because the Ministry isn't upholding its own laws."

"If you think the mighty Wizengamot is going to listen to a little Mud..." Umbridge tried to sound condescendingly, but the effect was ruined when she scooted back in her chair in order to avoid an angry Hermione.

"And..." Hermione interrupted, her voice rising to a crescendo, "I'll be having a nice chat with Rita Skeeter about your practices. I'm not sure the Ministry would want this kind of publicity."

Everyone in the room was now openly listening to Hermione. Work had ceased completely.

"Go, 'Mione!" Fred mumbled, though he hid his grin in one of his hands.

Hermione was still leaning over Umbridge's desk, breathing hard.

"Well, to be honest," Umbridge spat, clearly trying to save face, "I wouldn't want to burden any respectable member of our community with you anyway." And with a disgusted look at Fred, she added, "You truly deserve each other." For emphasis she rigidly hit her wand at the papers in front of Percy, and a bold stamp of 'approved' appeared on them.

"For once, we agree," Hermione spat, snatching up the papers and leaving with Fred in tow. Nobody bothered to say good-bye to Percy.

"Don't forget to make an appointment for your nuptials," Umbridge shouted after them. "Wouldn't want you to miss your deadline and be charged with assault."

Hermione stormed out of the office, barking at the next Ministry employee to show her where to get the appointment for a wedding. Fred and Hermione had to wait in yet another line to get said appointment. By the time a smiling Ministry witch wished them 'Good luck' for their February 20th wedding, both wanted nothing more than to leave the place. Clutching their papers to her chest, Hermione followed a seething Fred to the elevators and into the Atrium. Seeing yet another line in front of the outgoing fireplaces, Fred veered towards the visitors' entrance instead. Both he and Hermione had ripped off their visitor's badges before they even entered the telephone booth.

tbc

A/N: I hope you like the chapter. Thanks to my lovely betas.

Please review.