

If You Can't Sleep With Your Friends

by ThaPhoenix

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Chapter 1 of 1

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If You Can't Shag Your Friends...

I

The sound of joyous laughter hit Hermione Granger even before an overwhelming wave of warmth escaped from inside the shop. Momentarily disoriented, she took a step back, swallowing hard. She should have just turned Pansy down, told the former Slytherin that she couldn't leave the office before Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes closed at eight p.m. With the heavy workload that accompanied her latest project, it would have been believable, and Pansy would have let her off. Her conscience, however, would have been a very different matter.

After a rocky start, she and Pansy were finally forming something that could be called a friendship. Now that the other woman was in a six month-old relationship with Harry Potter, Hermione's best friend of over a decade, the last thing the brunette wanted was to rock the boat. For the first time since their first year in Hogwarts, Harry seemed truly happy (the heavy burden of enforced responsibility that had weighed him down during his youth was a thing of the past), and it was clear that that was largely due to the former Slytherin. And if there was anything Hermione valued more than her own interests, it was those of her two long-time best friends.

Sighing heavily at the knowledge that she had no choice (and also having no desire to stand out in the heavy rain any longer), Hermione pushed the door to 93 Diagon Alley further open and stepped in, shaking out her umbrella as she entered. The smell of gunpowder and strawberries made for an odd combination, hitting her nostrils with considerable force. Coughing instinctively, Hermione took in the bustling scene before her.

Even with just ten minutes to go before closing time, the store still contained more people than almost every other Diagon Alley store combined. Hogwarts students (identified by their house scarves and lengthy shopping lists) were rushing around, toting laden baskets full of merchandise. Parents prodded and poked at various products, looks of confusion and occasionally distaste on their otherwise weary faces. There were older people, too, making choice selections clearly there to make their regular purchases.

Hanging her umbrella on the silver goblin-shaped stand hidden in the crevice beside the door, she shrugged off her trench coat and folded it neatly over one arm. Strangely, Hermione had yet to spot either of the store's infamous flame-haired owners. Typically, they were found rushing around the store, popping up behind unsuspecting customers and showing off their latest products.

But maybe it was for the best. She didn't feel up to seeing any of her friends today not after the horrendous week she'd been having. In a five-day marathon rivalled only by her year on the run with Harry and Ron, Hermione had come to believe that someone up there truly had it in for her. From a key plan falling through at work to getting the worst head cold, it seemed that God had seen fit to try and ruin Hermione's life in more than one area. And just to top it all off, today had seen Terry Boot, her boyfriend of almost five months, dump her unceremoniously in front of half the Leaky Cauldron's lunchtime crowd.

Needless to say, Hermione was not in the best of moods. However, a promise was a promise and Hermione Granger always kept hers.

Setting aside her misgivings, Hermione gathered her resolve and headed through the busy store floor, winding through colourful aisles, loud explosions and a crowd that was rushing to score as much merchandise as possible in the last nine minutes.

Pansy had shown up at Hermione's office for lunch late last week, cap in hand. The former Slytherin had been desperate to get hold of one of those limited-edition green Pygmy Puffs Ginny Weasley was so fond of for her sister's birthday. Unable to make it over to Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes before heading off on a much-anticipated holiday with her third of the illustrious Golden Trio, Pansy had begged Hermione to buy one and send it off to Hogwarts by next Tuesday.

Now in the very centre of the floor where the twins kept their bestsellers, several brightly coloured cages containing almost a hundred numerous small bouncing creatures caught Hermione's eye. Relieved at still not having crossed one of the twins, the brunette breezed over, unlocked the cage and selected a dark green one from the back.

Great. Now if she could just...

"Hermione!"

Oh, crap.

Heart sinking into the wooden floorboards, Hermione turned to see a wide, cheerful grin and twinkling blue eyes. Fred Weasley, legendary prankster and proprietor of one of the fastest growing franchises in Wizarding Britain, stood before her, a dark smudge of gunpowder on one cheek.

"What are you doing here, 'Mione?" he asked, a gunpowder-stained hand tugging on a lock of Hermione's curly hair, mischievously. "Skin trouble? We have something for that, you know." Hermione rolled her eyes as Fred chuckled at his good-natured ribbing. Her complexion was perfectly fine, thank you very much.

"No, Fred." Hermione was exasperated, but a small smile still graced her lips. "Just picking up a Pygmy Puff for Pansy."

"Well, now that you're here, you might as well stay and have dinner," he said, leaning down and opening an empty cage. He threw something small and wriggling into it before quickly slamming the cage door shut and continuing, "We're having chicken parmesan." Fred waggled his eyebrows, now towering over Hermione once again. Hermione was shaking her head in refusal before she even realised it. She was barely handling this short conversation; the last thing she wanted was to have to put on a front throughout an entire dinner.

"I'd love to, Fred, really," she started apologetically. "But I have so much work to do for Monday, and I haven't even started yet. You know how I get." There, that was a legitimate-sounding excuse. Everyone, their mother and next-door neighbour knew how fanatic Hermione was about having work completed often weeks before its due date. Fred would have to let her off the hook.

But the Weasley twin frowned, taken aback. "Oh, come on, Hermione. It's just dinner. You've got all weekend to finish it." Hermione shuffled, uncomfortable.

"I-I really can't, Fred," she stuttered, knowing that if they were to continue speaking, she would give something away. She might have managed to fool her work colleagues thus far, but the twins were surprisingly intuitive.

Hermione tried to edge past a confused Fred, but didn't get very far before a large hand gently grabbed hold of her upper arm.

"Hermione," Fred's voice was lowered as he drew her closer, "is something wrong?"

"No, of course not." Hermione's voice was as even as she could make it, her thudding heart picking up the shortfall. She consciously maintained eye contact with the flame-haired man. "I've just got so much work to do and..."

"Well, then if there really is nothing wrong." Fred's eyes were knowing, his small smirk even more so. "You'll come to dinner with us." His tone turned persuasive. "We never see you anymore, Hermione." His words ended on a rumble, his eyes more fervent than usual. The brunette was enthralled, his gentle grasp burning into her upper arm.

"Come. We'll go to La Barbe, and you can bore us senseless about your week." His voice was almost a persuasive purr now, his eyes searing into hers, the noise of the crowd reduced to a low hum above which rose the pounding of her own racing heart. Hermione swallowed hard, and Fred noticed this, his irreverent smirk making an unwelcome return.

"You know you can't resist that chance. We won't even fall asleep this time," he continued cheekily. Merlin, he was infuriating.

"Ugh, fine!" Hermione gave in, casting her eyes to the wooden beams in the ceiling. "But I have to be home by nine." At her reluctant surrender, Fred's grin stretched across his face, eyes doing a merry dance.

"Great! Just let us lock up, and we'll be all yours, you devious minx." He ducked the swipe she aimed at his head and, after giving her a quick peck on the cheek, tore off into the now dwindling crowd in a blur of red and magenta. Despite her misgivings, Hermione couldn't prevent a small smile from coming to her lips.

She paid no attention to the small voices shouting warning in the back of her mind.

.....

"... So we tried the green one..."

"You know, the one that we hadn't tested yet..."

"And nothing happened! Nothing!"

"The bowl started overflowing; stuff just kept... coming..."

"And he's there, crying like a baby, crap shooting out of him at 300 miles per hour..."

"We're there trying to scoop the stuff up with anything we can find..."

"Trying everything. EVERYTHING..."

"But he just wouldn't stop shitting!"

"Stop, stop!" Hermione was in tears, her chest wracked by sobs of laughter. "I can't... I'm eating, for God's sake!" The twins grinned at her irrepressibly over their servings of baeckeoffe. "That is so disgusting!"

The three friends were seated at a candlelit table in the centre of La Barbe, the hottest new French restaurant in Wizarding Britain. After the twins had locked up their store and dragged a still-reluctant Hermione on the mile-long walk to the fashionable eatery (with the former Gryffindor Princess being grateful that the violet sheath dress she'd worn for work was just as appropriate for a night out), they had been granted highly coveted admittance without a reservation. That is how it was when you were two of the most successful entrepreneurs in London and accompanied by a member of the famed Golden Trio.

Fred and George caught Hermione up with their happenings over the last few months, spending the last hour regaling their female companion with tales of their various mishaps and numerous successes all inflected with their natural infectious humour.

"We don't know why you're judging us, Granger." George's blue eyes glinted, mischievously, over the table. "If anyone's to blame here, it's you." Hermione's eyebrows shot the ceiling.

"Oh?" Amusement rang through her voice. "And how is that?" Fred leaned back into the velvet-cushioned bench of the alcove, a devious smirk crossing his lips.

"Well, if you hadn't quit..."

"I didn't quit!" Hermione was laughing despite her indignant tone. Fred continued as if she hadn't spoken.

"... We probably would've known about the missing Boomslang skin a lot earlier."

"Damn straight, Fred," George picked up playfully, swallowing a mouthful of Bordeaux. Hermione's jaw dropped. The nerve!

"I can't believe you two." Hermione threw a napkin in their general direction, feigning anger, but the wide smile on her face gave her away. She knew the twins weren't really upset about her turning down their offer to continue working for them a few years ago, but they still loved to play the card every now and then. Even though she had received hundreds of unsolicited job offers after the war, she had joined the twins the summer after her eighth year to gain some work experience. The three had grown close almost as close as she was to Harry and Ron. Hermione had helped the twins develop some of their best-selling products, but stuck to her summer-only agreement and joined the Ministry's finance department, despite Fred and George's pleas to stay on indefinitely. The three tried to meet up as much as possible, but what with Hermione's unpredictable hours, that was less often than they would have liked.

"And it's 'Granger', now, is it?" Hermione asked playfully, eyebrow arched. George forked up some mutton and potato, smiling cheekily, while Fred tilted his head back, eyeing her.

"Apparently," he drawled, eyes flashing confrontationally. Hermione rolled her eyes. When Fred got into this stubborn mood, he could be unbearable.

"Whatever, Weasley," the brunette directed back, sipping her merlot. While her gaze was on her glass, her taste buds savouring the hints of berry and currant, the twins exchanged agreeing glances.

"What's wrong, Hermione?"

Hermione glanced up, long suffering. Fred and George were well known for changing subjects at the drop of a Knut, often ambushing their victim with little to no prior warning. Just what were they up to now?

"There's been something wrong all evening," George continued, his blue eyes boring into Hermione. "What is it?" The former Gryffindor Princess swallowed, eyes flickering between the two flame-haired men seated across from her.

"What are you two talking about?" Hermione feigned ignorance even as her heart drifted down a few inches. Letting a carefully bemused smile play across her lips, she took another sip of merlot. Judging by the twins' serious expressions, though, they weren't buying what she was trying to sell.

"Don't play us for fools, Granger," Fred took up, his mouth quirked almost cruelly. Hermione's heart thudded hard, and she brushed her chest to soothe the ache left behind. This is just what she had wanted to avoid. So far, the enjoyable evening and the twins' distracting company had done wonders to make her forget all about... the day's events.

"I'm not... "

"Bullshit." George's voice was quiet and Arctic cold. Hermione froze as his eyes bore into hers, a stark contrast to his pale, freckled, chiselled face. The brunette had always been better than most at telling the two apart they were so different to anyone who cared to look beyond the obvious, cared to identify the minute differences that made them individuals and not only two halves of the same whole but at that very moment, they had never looked more similar.

"Is it Terry?" Fred's curt tone rose Hermione from her stupor. "What did he do?" Another hard thud. Oh, God. Why had she let him and George convince her to come out with them?

"I don't have to put up with these baseless accusations." Hermione grabbed her trench coat and moved to rise from the bench, but George swung up his foot with the reflexes of a seasoned Quidditch player, barricading her in. "Move your foot, George, before I move it for you."

"What's going on with you and Terry, Hermione?" George's voice was as quiet as before, his eyes now trying to read her expression. Hermione was careful to keep her face blank.

"I want to leave, George." Hermione was adamant, her gaze now in the direction of the bustling restaurant. She was thankful that they had been granted one of the restaurant's private alcoves, as the other customers had yet to be alerted to the power struggle going on right at the eatery's heart, else tomorrow, it would be all over the gossip pages.

Well, it wouldn't be the first time, Hermione thought. Indignantly tossing back her hair, Hermione prepared to clamber over George's outstretched leg.

"Hermione." The worry in Fred's voice stopped her mid-lift. She turned back to see the twins wearing concerned expressions, their eyes bluer than she had ever seen them.

"I don't want to talk about it." Hermione caved, eyes falling to the floor.

Above her, Fred and George exchanged another look before the latter asked, "Don't want to talk about it at all, or don't want to talk about it here?"

Hermione paused for a moment, gaze flickering between the two of them. She could still go home, still relax on her huge, comfy sofa with a Muggle DVD and some popcorn.

Still carry this heavy burden on her shoulders.

"Don't want to talk about it here," she gave in, eyes still on the woodgrain floor. The recessed lighting showed distress written all over her face, despite her attempts to keep it hidden.

"Okay," one of the twins said gruffly. However, Hermione was no longer paying either one any attention, so lost was she in the humiliation and misery that had been creeping in for almost twelve hours.

She didn't notice as George requested the bill, nor when Fred shrugged her into her trench. She barely even registered their progress through the still-bustling restaurant, past the few photographers milling outside (who quickly snapped a few shots of the trio), down the rain-soaked cobblestones of Covent Garden, nor the pop of Side-Along Apparition that took them to large hallway with pine floorboards.

It was only as George removed her coat and gently guided her to the twins' living room that she came to, his large hands sending much-needed warmth flooding through her system. She had always loved the twins' Chelsea flat, having helped to choose it over five years ago when they'd officially moved out of the Burrow. The recessed lighting, wall sconces, pine floorboards, massive cushy sofas, heavy oak tables and vibrant colour scheme of indigo, jade and cream were picked out by the three of them, the twins following her advice almost to the letter.

It made for a beautiful but comfortable home, a stark contrast to Hermione's own abode which, with its minimalist vibe and sparse furniture, was better to look at than live in.

"Here, sweetheart," Fred said softly, handing her a mug of something hot. "Drink this." Hermione took it, sipping it automatically. The two took a seat, denting the sofa on either side of her. The muffled sound of gently falling rain hitting the double-paned windows soothed her somewhat, as did the hot cocoa Fred had poured into the warm mug. Hermione closed her eyes briefly, savouring the rich taste, before focussing for the first time in what felt like hours.

She leaned back into the cushy sofa, ready to face the twins once more. Both were gazing at her with soft expressions on their faces, concern still in their eyes. Hermione couldn't help but be comforted by their presence, by their... theirness. It was part of what had drawn her to them in the first place, what had made her work for them all those years ago.

"It's just been one hell of a day." Hermione's voice was more of a croak, constricted by misuse and recent misery, but she managed a quiet chuckle. The twins smiled in relief, their eyes brightening immediately at even the slightest change in her mood. "I don't even know where to start..."

"Start at the beginning." George's voice was quiet, measured, the way one would speak to a bewildered kitten that would readily flinch at the slightest contact. It worked, though. Hermione's nerves settled as she looked back at them both. She glanced down at the half-empty mug, gathering up the courage to say what she hadn't been able to aloud thus far.

"Terry broke up with me," Hermione admitted, gaze still on her cocoa. She felt the twins shift beside her, so she rushed on, "At lunch. In the middle of the Leaky Cauldron." Fred hissed in anger as she glanced up to see George's eyes narrow.

"But that wasn't even the worst part." She laughed mirthlessly. "You wouldn't believe what he told me."

"What?" Even the most obtuse individual would be able to hear the barely restrained anger in Fred's curt question.

"Get this: apparently, I'm shit in bed," she giggled, the mug shaking in her hands from the force of her laughter. "I can't orgasm, and according to good old Terry, it's my fault because and this is direct quote here, ladies and gentlemen 'I'm more frigid than a thousand-year-old glacier and less likely to set the bed alight than damp firewood'. Can you believe it?" Hermione was cackling now, head thrown back and tears of laughter streaming down her face. She missed the looks of anger the twins exchanged, their clenched fists and gritted teeth.

"He said that?" Fred ground out. Hermione looked up at him, surprised at his anger.

"You have to see the funny side, surely?" she asked, wiping away the trails of moisture from her cheeks. She glanced over at George for backup, but frowned when she saw he wore a similar expression to his twin. "Come on, guys. You're the pranksters, here!" She jostled their broad shoulders, playfully, barely even shifting them. When their eyes remained angry and their mouths stern, Hermione frowned.

"It's funny," she repeated, less sure. Fred and George continued staring at her. "It is," she insisted.

But it wasn't. And she knew it wasn't.

"It isn't, is it?" Hermione asked quietly, eyes falling once more to the lukewarm cocoa clasped tightly in her hands. "It's just sad." Her voice trembled, lower lip wobbling, uncontrollably. A milky film had formed on the liquid. The only sounds were those of the still-falling rain pattering on the floor-to-ceiling windows and the ticking of the family clock over on the far wall.

Biting down hard on that wayward lip, the chocolate-eyed girl looked up at the high ceiling. She was not going to shed a single tear over that... that dick.

Two arms wound their way around her slim shoulders, but Hermione shrugged them off. Comfort was not what she needed right then. What she really needed was...

And in a flash, an idea came to her.

An idea that, had she been less upset, would have been immediately dismissed for the foolish, unwise, potentially catastrophic idea it was.

But...

"Sleep with me," Hermione blurted out. Beside her, the twins stilled.

"What?" George's voice was more a croak.

"Sleep with me," Hermione repeated, the idea sounding even better the second time. It gave her the courage to glance between Fred and George who were looking more astounded than she had ever seen them. Hermione rushed to explain, "It's only when I'm with someone else that I can't orgasm. By myself, I do just fine."

Shocked silence.

"It's not like you haven't done it before." Hermione's words flooded out before she could close the gates. "Everyone knows that the only thing you two do even better in twos than WWW is sex." It was true. It was a well-kept secret shared among a select few, but those privy to it knew all about the twins' special talents in that particular area. Hermione had heard at least three women tell tales of how satisfied they had left friends of theirs (it was always 'friends' for some reason, never first-hand encounters). The three of them were reasonably close; it wasn't like she didn't trust them. She knew they would take care of her at the very least, even if she didn't orgasm.

But the twins were still silent, now doing that silent communication thing of theirs. Hermione's heart sank as she realised what was going on.

"Unless... unless, you're just not interested in... in me." Gathering up the last remnants of her shattered pride, Hermione put the mug on the small coffee table, the oak muffling the sound, before almost leaping from the sofa. "I'm just going to..."

Shuffling past a still bewildered-looking George, Hermione almost skidded across the polished floor on her way out of the living room. How could she have been so stupid? Of course they wouldn't want her. Why would they? Good looking, wealthy, reportedly sexually skilled naturally they'd want to stay a mile away from her lack of sexual allure.

She wrenched her trench from the wrought iron coat rack, not even bothering to put it on, and had her fingers on the door knob before she heard hurried footsteps behind

her and felt a hand gently grasp her arm.

"Hermione, wait," came a gentle voice. She paused, swallowing back the lump of tears that had taken her throat captive. At this moment, Hermione wasn't sure what hurt more: Terry's public dumping or the twins' rejection. The former had the edge, but just barely.

"Come back," another almost identical voice came from slightly further down the hall. Reluctantly, Hermione turned to face Fred and George who were once again looking concerned.

"But..."

"You didn't let us answer." Fred, the one who spoke last, was careful to hold her hesitant gaze, eyes urging her to heed their request. Hermione looked back at George, who was eyeing her carefully. What was the worst that could happen? They'd already rejected her. Surely, hearing them out couldn't be much worse. And even if it were, what with the week she'd had, it was apparent that she was a sucker for punishment.

Sighing heavily, Hermione allowed George to tug her back to the cushy sofa in the living room. The three took their former seats, with Hermione's gaze fixed on the now cold mug on the table. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Fred clench his hands on his knees. On her other side, George appeared just as tense. Great, she'd made them uncomfortable.

Hermione, why couldn't you have just kept your mouth shut?

"Look, it's okay, guys, I get it," she pre-empted them, a self-mocking smile twisting her lips. "You're fine being friends, but you don't want to take things any further." She looked up and saw George about to say something, so she continued, "No, it's fine. Truly," she reassured them. "I'm just going to go home and..."

"Hermione, sit down." Fred's tone was sharp and commanding when she tried to stand up, his arm moving to restrain her. Hermione obeyed without thinking, George letting out a quiet chuckle as she did so.

"You didn't give us any time to process what you said," Fred went on, more gently.

"Really, Hermione?" George laughed softly, gently bringing Hermione round to look at him. "Give us a little more credit. Even if we were going to turn you down, we most definitely wouldn't have done it like that."

"We're not Boot." Fred's face was dark when Hermione looked over at him. Hermione remained silent for a moment longer, glancing between the twins, who gazed back at her, earnestly.

"So, what were you going to say?" Hermione was unsure, eyes wide, radiating the insecurity stemming from several years of bad boyfriends and even worse breakups. A comforting smile graced George's face, lighting it up in a way that not even the brightest bulb could achieve.

"Yes."

"Yes", to what?" Hermione had been made a fool of enough today. She had to be sure that they meant what she thought they meant. From her right, Fred's large warm hand came to her chin and lifted her face to its smiling owner.

"Yes, we'll sleep with you."