

Restricted

by Grace has Victory

A boy. A girl. A problem. A complication. Several cliches. A resolution. A twist. The H/Hr ship that floats because all H/Hr ships have sunk. (Parody)

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Professor Trelawney broke into hysterical sobs during Divination and announced to the startled class, and a very disapproving Umbridge, that Harry was not going to suffer an early death after all, but would live to a ripe old age, become Minister for Magic and have twelve children. [Order of the Phoenix, p. 513, British Edition.]

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Hermione placed her quill on top of her parchment and quietly pushed aside her chair. Nobody was looking. Indeed, nobody was in sight in the far end of the library except Justin, who was scribbling furiously at the next table, and Padma, whose nose was stuck firmly in a leather volume across the aisle. With her permission slip clutched in her hand, Hermione swallowed her nerves and stepped across to the Restricted Section.

"Harry?"

He was there. A seventeen-year-old boy with bushy hair that tangled down to his glasses was perched on top of a library stepladder, a huge book opened across his knees. He had one hand inside the nearest shelf, stroking a second book, which suggested he was not reading the first with much concentration. As soon as he heard Hermione's voice, he snapped the book shut, shoved it back into the shelf, and sprang from the ladder *snap, scrape, thud*.

"Harry, they'll hear us!" she whispered.

"Doesn't matter," he replied, pecking her on the cheek. "As long as it's *book* noises, there's nothing to hide. I've been with the jolly books for half an hour what kept you?"

"Well, I did have that essay to finish for Binns. And another to research for Snape. And I really did go through the rigmarole of convincing Madam Pince that I have permission to be here." She showed her slip, signed by Professor Sprout, which granted her permission to research naturally occurring poisons in the Restricted Section. "Which is okay, truly, Harry, because I do have to research some poisons. But the *real* reason I'm late is ... Ron."

Harry frowned. "What about Ron?"

"Ron suspects us."

Harry was only mildly concerned. "Well, I suppose he has to know sometime." His arms slid along hers and tightened around her waist. "Don't we have better things to do

than talk about Ron?"

But Hermione resisted his embrace, her hands on his shoulders preventing him from pulling her any closer, her bright brown eyes limpid with concern. "Harry, I know Ron has to know eventually, but not yet we agreed not yet. He's so *jealous*, he'd have a *tantrum*, he might tell my parents, or tell McGonagall it would then take about twenty-four hours for *everyone* to know. I'd like us to finish our NEWTs before we have to face all those arguments."

"Yes, yes, we agreed to that." She could see that he was less worried than she was. "But Ron's bound to be suspicious if we shut him out. I don't like lying to him, and our excuses aren't going to convince him for much longer."

"Correction," said Hermione. "My excuses did not convince him today. I told him I had to go to the library to write essays and he said, 'Sneaking off to the Restricted Section to meet Harry, more likely!' I tried to laugh it off, but he just said I couldn't wait to be gone."

"You should have told him the essays were *urgent*."

"Oh, I did. But I had to loiter for nearly twenty minutes, trying to give Ron the impression that I wasn't really in a hurry to be off. And even then, his last words as I climbed through the Fat Lady's portrait were, 'Are you in love with Harry or something?' I didn't reply, but I really don't think we'll be able to fool Ron for a day longer."

"Fool me about *what*?"

Harry and Hermione sprang apart as a tall, red-headed boy stepped into the Restricted Section, his blue eyes blazing.

"Well?" he demanded. "Why should I be fooled? What's going on here?"

"Keep your voice down!" hissed Harry. "This is a *library*, you know!"

"Hermione." Ron's voice was hardly a decibel lower. "If you are fooling around in here "

"Ron, *mind your own business!*" cut in Harry.

"Anything that concerns Hermione *is* my business, so if you have laid a hand on her "

"If you think I would lay a hand on *any* girl especially in a public place "

Hermione pulled out her wand and whispered, "*Silencio*" Ron and Harry were left mouthing soundlessly at one another. But Hermione had been too late to save them. It was at that moment that a new voice interrupted. Not the indignant, injured tones of Madam Pince, who might have had just cause, but the icy threat of another person, whose business it was not.

"Potter! Weasley! Come out and explain this maniac behaviour!"

With dull resignation, Ron and Harry obeyed. Professor Snape did not seem to have noticed Hermione, but it did not occur to her to do anything except glide silently after the boys.

"Well?"

Harry and Ron mouthed like goldfish for a moment, but Hermione recognised that they had nothing redeeming to say. Leaving them in silence might be the pathway of least trouble.

"*Nothing* excuses this kind of racket in the library." Snape's soft hiss was like the thunder of mighty oceans. "Weasley, you have pushed the limits once too often this week. Potter, you have been crossing boundaries all *year* like your father and grandfather before you. You will both accompany me to the Headmistress's office!"

The boys lowered their eyes and set off a pace behind Professor Snape. Hermione followed three paces behind Harry and Ron. She knew that going to the Headmistress's would mean a fair hearing, but it made the situation very serious, and justice was not likely to work in their favour today. What, after all, were their excuses for the din? Harry had been hiding out in the Restricted Section, without permission to touch the books, in order to meet his girlfriend, and Ron had been spying on Harry. Their best hope was to admit frankly that they had taken the moral low ground, accept whatever punishment was meted out, and hope this did not result in being forced to confess their secrets.

"Red herring!" The stone gargoyles sprang apart as Snape spoke the password, and they all stepped onto the moving staircase. Hermione hoped the boys would have the sense to keep quiet and then remembered they had no choice. She was surprised at her own calmness as they entered the round office. Professor McGonagall looked up politely from her desk and asked, "Well, Severus?"

"I caught Potter and Weasley brawling in the library. They have none of their usual pack of excuses and as they have taken no notice of me all year, I decided that you might deal with them in person, Professor."

"Is this true, boys?" If Professor McGonagall was irritated at being disturbed by this trivial matter, she betrayed no sign of it. "Did Professor Snape hear you quarrelling in the library?"

Harry and Ron nodded, eyes still downcast, while Snape added, "In the *Restricted* Section."

"How inappropriate!" declared Professor McGonagall. "Twenty points from Gryffindor. Twenty point *each*!"

Professor Snape looked as if he wanted to protest the leniency of this sentence; however, before he could say anything, Professor McGonagall spoke again.

"Potter, Weasley, you may leave and be glad that you are not in worse trouble. But after you have taken them away, Severus, I would like a few words alone with Miss "

But she was already speaking to empty air. Harry and Ron had been ushered out of the office in an angry flap of Snape's cloak, and the snap of the door ended Professor McGonagall's words. Hermione was alone with the Headmistress.

"So, explain this." Professor McGonagall sounded a very little less chilly. "I could see that you had hexed the boys somehow, so you obviously know all about it. What was that very loud discussion in that very unsuitable place?"

Hermione was not an experienced liar. She wrestled with plausible alternatives for a moment, then gave up and confessed. "Ron was accusing Harry of being my boyfriend."

"How interesting. And is he?"

One could not tell the Headmistress to mind her own business, so Hermione nodded. "Yes. And Ron is jealous. Harry has always been *his* friend. And my parents will be so upset when they find out after all, my father is Minister for Magic ..."

"Oh, do calm down." Despite the impatient words, there was now a kindly tone to the Headmistress's voice. "Miss Potter, I am perfectly well aware of your father's position,

and that Mr Weasley is your first cousin. But that hardly amounts to a scandal that will bring down the Ministry."

Hermione was startled. "But, Professor ... everyone says ... well, it's not really allowed ... not when you're cousins."

"Miss Potter, there is no formal rule against it. Your parents may be less than delighted by your news, but worse things have happened to them. Your aunt and namesake will probably take less than ten minutes to calculate the exact percentage of genetic risk. I think your mother will be far more distressed to learn that you were deceitfully sneaking around in corners with a boy than to hear that the boy in question was Harry Weasley."

Hermione digested this while Professor McGonagall waved her wand for the office door to swing open.

"So remember, Miss Potter no more sneaking around. Face reality and tell the truth!"

Recollecting that she still had to un-hex her cousin and her brother, Hermione hurried down the spiral stairs. In the corridor she passed Justin Macmillan, arm in arm with Frances Longbottom. *They* had nothing to hide. On the stairs, that Muggle-born Slytherin, Dudley Polkiss, was teasing Padma Goldstein. She considered intervening, but Padma was clearly managing to handle Dudley by herself.

Hermione could brave Ron's fury by herself, and by tomorrow *she* would not be hiding anything either. She reached Gryffindor Tower at a bolt, impatient to find Harry ...

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A/N 1. Thanks to my alpha-reader, my daughter **Julia**, aged 8, who was willing to suspend her shipping prejudices for long enough to hear this story.

A/N 2. Extra thanks to my beta-reader, **Katinka**, for picking up all the stylistic errors and ineptitudes, and for encouraging me to submit this story despite its controversial subject matter. I didn't realise American culture was so different from British in this respect.