

Splendor in the Garden

by doz muffinxc

When Hermione moves into a cottage in the country, her new house and the garden that comes with it prove to be more of a challenge than she expected. With the help of an old school friend and an ex-Potions professor, she sets out to get to the bottom of the mysterious homestead and ends up with more than she bargained for.

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It was not without a sense of pride that Hermione Granger looked upon the compact cottage that was to become her first, permanent home since the end of the war. Greater still was the feeling of relief that trickled down from her head to her toes which were, at the moment, completely obscured by ankle-high grass and a hodgepodge of weeds. Yes, it would need work, but she was more than up to the challenge.

All mine, she thought with a smile as she pushed the rusty gate closed behind her. *All mine, and no one to tell me how I should arrange the furniture or trim the hedges. I could paint that door purple, and it wouldn't make a wit of difference to anyone but myself.*

She couldn't help but feel a small twinge of ingratitude. Mrs. Weasley had meant well by her little, pointed suggestions whenever she had come to visit Hermione and Ron's London flat. The older woman had loved her like a daughter - perhaps still did, though Hermione doubted her name was held in very high esteem at the Burrow these days - and never failed to bring some useful, magical knickknack to make her would-be daughter-in-law's life easier as a homemaker.

Homemaker. Hermione shuddered. How could Ron have thought she would ever be the sort of woman to stay at home, cook meals, and raise half-a-dozen little witches and wizards? Not after all they had been through. Not even if she had been halfway decent at baking or cleaning or handling delicate things like babies or china or starched linens, or...

When she had broken off their engagement, Hermione had expected a rift to occur in hers and Harry's friendship, as well. She knew Ron would want nothing to do with her; his pride was too great to suffer the company of a woman who had spurned his love, no matter how long they had been friends. The prospect of losing Harry, Ron's best mate, at the same time had almost made her rethink her decision. But to his everlasting credit, Harry had taken the separation in stride. He was disappointed, of course, but he hadn't seemed surprised by the announcement.

"You deserve to be happy, 'Mione," he had said, "and if that means you without Ron, then that's what has to happen. I won't say I'm not sorry, and I'll probably never hear the end of it from Ginny, but she loves you, too. We both do. And you know, I think even Ron knows it's for the best."

Hermione seriously doubted this last assertion, but she hadn't argued, had been too grateful for the support of her closest friend. In the end, it had been Harry who had suggested that she look outside of London for a new situation that was both far enough away from Ron to start fresh and near enough to the city not to be completely sequestered from friends and family.

The weather was perfect for the move. She had arranged for her belongings to be transported by wizarding parcel post later that afternoon, but she had brought a few boxes - mainly books and personal treasures - along on this, her first official visit as homeowner.

She had only seen the house a few times before agreeing to the terms of purchase, so perfect had been prospect of having her own place and at so reasonable a price. The worn, blue stone of the façade stared down at her as she levitated her boxes along the dirt path up to the solid oak front door. Her eyes drifted lovingly up the ivy-covered sides of the cottage, tracing the windows with their beveled, diamond-shaped glass insets and up further to admire the lattice work that twisted its way up to the roof. Blue shingles, weather worn and cracked in places, ascended at a sharp incline to meet a dormer window flanked by two spire-like chimneys. No smoke rose from their peaks, but she would soon see to that.

Yes, she sighed happily, *this will do just fine.*

After seeing her favorite books properly ensconced on the shelf of what would soon become the library - one of the largest rooms in the house, and with a perfect view of the garden - Hermione had set the water on for tea and composed a quick note to inform Harry and Ginny that she had arrived safely. Her owl, a tawny bird with bright eyes that she had taken to calling Arce, gave Hermione a parting hoot and soared off with the epistle held gently in her beak.

Sunset was still a few hours away, and Hermione planned to make the most of her first night in her new home. But rather than venture into the dusty upper rooms, she stepped out the back door and, steaming mug in hand, stepped gingerly through the unkempt yard towards the garden. This, more than anything else, had been the selling point of the house for her, and although she hadn't had time to do more than a cursory inventory of the plants she knew from reading *Common Plants of England and their Magical Uses*, she had been impressed by the number of different species she had observed on her very first visit to the property. As she walked the overgrown paths through the rows, she listed them in her head.

There was *Aletris Farinosa*, or True Unicorn Root, with its miniature, bell-like flowers and ferny leaves. Wild basil grew in profusion alongside burdock and thyme and, unless she was mistaken, a prodigious crop of rue. How the previous owner had managed to get so many different species to coexist in one environment was astounding and had, no doubt, required a dab hand at agricultural sorcery. Hermione could not wait to start identifying the unknown species.

Stretched out in her armchair later that evening, Hermione composed two letters: one to the Ministry of Magic, requesting an additional week of vacation to get herself settled; the second of a more personal nature, to a wizard who she knew would find the prospect of helping her sort through half an acre of flora irresistibly enticing.