

Cottage in a Cornfield



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Title: **Cottage in a Cornfield**

Story Number: -

Rating: R

Pairing: Draco/Hermione

Summary: Draco's divorced, Hermione's doing voluntary work; neither is happy.



Winner of the LJ **dramione_awards** challenge, ficlet (501 - 1000 words) category. The prompt was: *For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.* Carl Sagan. Inspired by John Constable's *Cottage in a Cornfield*.

The main characters in this story were created by JK Rowling. No offence is intended and no profit is being made by borrowing them for use in this story, which is intended as a transformative commentary on the original.

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"Granger?"

Hermione would recognise his voice anywhere, though she hasn't heard it since he received his pardon. "Malfoy!" The years, she notices, have been kind to him, adding an attractive self-assurance to his always-striking looks.

"I didn't realise you worked at the Museum."

"Only on Sundays," she replies, "I'm a volunteer." *Anything to keep myself busy...*

"I've come to see the new picture," he says.

"It's through there." She points towards the next room, but Malfoy gestures, inviting her to go in before him and, though she knows she should be downstairs, patrolling the Mediaeval rooms, there's something so commanding about him that, feeling a bit like Crabbe or Goyle, she escorts him through the door.

The little painting, on short-term loan from its anonymous owner, hangs in splendid isolation against a moss-green wall.

Hermione watches Malfoy lean in, and look closely.

It depicts an ancient thatched cottage in a field of waving corn. "I'm told," she says, "that the weather changes with the seasons—and I have seen it rain..."

"It makes you feel," he says, straightening, and stepping backwards, "as though you could just walk into it, and leave all this crap behind."

Hermione looks up at him, curiously. But he doesn't return her gaze and, after a moment, she leaves him to his contemplation.



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For the next few weeks, their Sunday mornings follow the same pattern.

He arrives early, seeks her out, and herds her—somehow—towards the painting, and they stand, side-by-side, sharing pleasantries.

"You feel as though you could walk into it," he says, for possibly the twentieth time.

"I'd never thought of you as the country type," she says.

"I *live* in the country, Granger."

"You live in a great big stately home, Malfoy."

He laughs, and turns to her, smiling; their eyes meet, and his smile slowly fades; he leans in closer, closer, and Hermione's eyes widen.

She's heard rumours that his marriage is over...

Someone enters the room and, suddenly, they're yards apart.

...

"I've been doing some research," he says, the following Sunday, and—he's so excited—his hand cups her elbow as he guides her up the staircase.

When they reach the gallery, he glances round, making sure they're alone, before he pulls out his wand and points it at the painting.

"Malfoy!" Magic's forbidden in the Museum.

"It's all right," he says, "I'm a Trustee..." He takes a moment to compose himself, then, "*Penetro.*"

Hermione gasps. Nothing's visibly different—the picture hasn't obviously changed—but, suddenly, she knows it's possible.

Malfoy grasps her hand. "Ready?"

She nods.

They take a step together, and then another, and then...

They're standing in late summer sunlight!

...

In the weeks that follow, they return again and again to the painting's magical world.

There, they're just 'Draco' and 'Hermione', a young man and a young woman, unencumbered by the past. When they open the ivy-covered gate and follow the narrow track to the little cottage, they feel at home.

They work together—using magic for only the most difficult tasks—learning how to harvest the apples, and thresh the corn, and harness the horse to the cart; learning to gather the eggs, and brew the ale, and bake the pumpkin pasties in the wood-fired oven.

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And the larder's always magically stocked with hams and cheeses and jars of pickles, and the cottage is always warm and cheerful, a place of happiness.

Sometimes, Hermione goes into the sweet-smelling bedroom, and looks at the bed, with its carved bedposts and its lovingly-stitched quilt, and wishes—

"Come on," says Draco, poking his head through the window, "I've got the grain on the cart. Let's go to the mill."

They've rambled along the road for miles in both directions, and found a village, with a tavern, a market, and a circulating library, found a little church and, further on, a water mill, and Hermione doesn't know if they'll ever find an end to this world.

But one thing she does know is that, every week, it gets harder and harder to leave it.

...

In late October, the sign reads *Final Day*. The painting's going back to its owner.

Their last visit, spent tending the garden, is bitter sweet.

And perhaps that's why, when they're walking back to the gate, Draco suddenly catches Hermione's hand and pulls her into his arms and why, when she responds so eagerly, he lifts her up, and carries her back to the little bedroom, and they make love there, like husband and wife.

Next morning, when—reluctantly—they decide they must return to the real world, they find the way shut.

It doesn't take them long to work out that the painting's been taken down from the wall and sealed in a crate.

...

Winter comes, and they stoke up the fire, and celebrate Yuletide, decking the rooms with holly, and inviting their neighbours to feast and make merry. January's hard, but the thaw comes and, eventually, Spring brings green shoots, and fragrant blossoms, and wobbly-legged lambs.

...

Hermione packs a basket with bread and cheese and a jug of ale, and covers it with a cloth. Draco's digging a ditch, which is back-breaking work, and he won't use magic, and won't let her help—she strokes her rounded belly, smiling contentedly.

"Let's go and feed your daddy."

Draco meets her half way across the cornfield, pulling his shirt on as he walks, and she can see immediately that something's wrong. "What is it?"

"We're out again—the picture's on a wall somewhere."

Her heart lurches. "Do you want to go home?" she asks, softly.

"Do you?" He takes the basket from her and, giving her his arm, leads her to the gate.

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Together, they stare out into a cold, dull room. "I asked you first," she says.

He sets the basket down and turns to her, drawing her into his arms and holding her close, and he murmurs into her wayward hair, "I think we've found our home, Hermione."

THE END