

Puzzle Pieces

by selinabln

On the night before Rose's wedding, somebody has to face the ghosts of the past.
Written for the SS/HG Gift Exchange Winter 2008.

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Summary:

On the night before Rose's wedding, somebody has to face the ghosts of the past. Written for the SS/HG Gift Exchange Winter 2008.

Original Prompt: Prompt 1) Post-epilogue: Rose is engaged to Scorpius; a divorced Hermione seeks an end to the long-standing Malfoy/Weasley feud; Severus holds the key/information for resolution. What happens? Does Severus need "convincing" to help? (no villain!Ron! please...clueless is okay).

Author's note: Nothing but a bit angsty fluff.

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Puzzle Pieces

Two lives, two hearts

joined together in friendship... united forever in love

request the honour of your presence ...to witness our vows.

Her breath was shaky, as were her fingers, as she brushed once more over the letters imprinted on the ivory-coloured invitation card, memorising the feel against her skin. Realisation had finally begun to sink in for her during this short moment of silence she granted herself.

Tomorrow. The wedding would be tomorrow.

But even now that the date had eventually arrived, her heart, so determined to feel light and joyous, was anxious with anticipation.

Her hand curled tightly around the stem of the glass as she sipped at the red wine, trying to get hold of her emotions. She closed her eyes as the warm, rich taste enfolded her, calming her nerves and evoking a memory, pleasant but neglected for far too long.

"Detention, every weekend until Christmas? Honestly, Severus, wasn't deducting 50 points from the boy enough?" Hermione couldn't help asking as her gaze strayed to the nearly empty Gryffindor hourglass. Ernest Greenville was usually a quiet and sensible student, not one of the habitual troublemakers Gryffindor House tended to accommodate every now and then.

Walking next to her, her colleague cloaked himself in silence as they both crossed the Entrance Hall on their evening patrol. It was just after curfew, but the early November wind was already whistling quietly through the cracks and chinks of Hogwarts.

"Severus, he only opened the door to the Pixie cage while you were out of the classroom," she reminded him, but his silence continued, and Hermione cast him a thoughtful look.

A deep frown graced Severus' forehead, and his gaze was directed straight ahead, deliberately avoiding hers.

Hermione had to hide a small triumphant smile. In the last year, since his return to Hogwarts, she had learned that this reaction was the certain sign that she was gaining ground against Severus Snape on a topic.

Gently, she added, "The boy is usually terrified by your mere presence, you know."

Severus met her comment with a snort, and the silence was broken.

"Obviously, Mr Greenville was not terrified enough, or he wouldn't have disregarded my explicit order not to touch the cage in my absence."

Hermione sighed. "You know very well that the Messrs Selwyn and Bulstrode dared him to do it."

"Exactly."

Severus stopped in his tracks, and as she turned to him, he crossed his arms in front of himself, a dark unfathomable expression shadowing his features.

"Hermione, don't you agree that it is only in Mr Greenville's best interest to learn that even being dared or lured into doing something doesn't save him from the consequences of his deed, especially as long as those consequences can be still measured in detentions and house points"

The words were spoken quietly and lacked the usual biting note he used to lecture people, but even so, her heart constricted for a moment. So many peaceful years, but the man in front of her was once again trying to protect children from more serious experiences than hideous Boggarts or loose Pixies.

In January, when the former Defence teacher, Professor McAllister, hadn't returned from the winter break on time without prior notice (something was rumoured about a dragon accident), Minerva had once again extended her offer to Severus to take the post. And this time, much to everybody's surprise, he had accepted it. Eventually, twenty-nine years after Voldemort's defeat and...as Hermione had sadly noted at the time...in the first year after young Lily Potter had taken her NEWTs, and no other Potter child was roaming the halls of the castle, Severus Snape had returned to Hogwarts.

But apparently, the ghosts of the past wouldn't leave him alone.

With two steps, she closed the distance between them and placed a hand gently on his left forearm. She had initiated such contact before and did so easily. He had long become more a friend than a mere colleague in her eyes. But even now, she could tell that he still wasn't used to her blunt Gryffindor gestures of affection, and for a moment she feared he would shrink from her touch.

He didn't. Inclining his head, Severus merely observed her, an eyebrow arched inquiringly.

"I know what you are trying to teach Mr Greenville, and I understand why, Severus," she said, squeezing his arm reassuringly. "But please, don't forget, he is just a second-year."

But her words became meaningless as he lowered his gaze to her hand, still resting on his forearm. His eyes lingered there for a long moment, unconcealed grief playing on his face.

Hermione blinked, unable to comprehend what had to cause this sudden change in him. It took a moment, but then, with the sharp ache that so often accompanied cognition for her, she truly realised what she was so carelessly touching through uncounted layers of fabric, what had caused all this grief for him.

The Dark Mark.

Her heart caught in her throat. But before she could follow her immediate instinct to pull her hand away, he cupped it with his own, meeting her eyes.

"Don't."

And she didn't. Gently, he brushed his thumb along the back of hand, his gaze not straying from hers.

"Your hands are cold."

They were, obviously, but words had left her. Hermione could only nod, heart and mind enfolded by the warm, dizzying sensation of his touch.

Slowly, he turned her palm upwards; the tip of his wand tickled her skin as he murmured a Warming Charm, but it was the well-hidden but continuous brushing of his thumb that set her skin on fire.

"The Headmistress would surely be furious with me if I allow her indispensable Arithmancy professor to catch a cold, don't you agree, Hermione?"

She barely heard the question, nor did she recognise the affectionate note in his voice; the only thing she was aware of was the insistent, rapid sound of her heartbeat, humming in her ears.

"I, well—"

"I think—"

He smirked. "Yes, Hermione?"

She swallowed, struggling to come up with some kind of witty answer that would help her to conceal her flustered state. But eventually, it wasn't her own determination but something else that cut through the fog in her mind, a sound that would always reach her consciousness and had so for the last twenty years.

"Mum!"

Rose.

Her daughter's voice echoed from the other end of the Entrance Hall, and Hermione turned instinctively around towards where she must be standing. Only her heart mourned the sudden loss of Severus' touch as she felt him let go of her hand.

Do children always have to have such a lousy timing? she thought, amused, before a slight worry gripped her. Rose would have never come to visit her at such a late hour and unannounced, if not for a vital reason.

She frowned.

Rose was walking rapidly from the entrance door towards them. Her dark travelling coat twirled gracefully around her calves and her long, auburn curls waved behind her each step of the way. She looked every bit like the self-confident young woman Hermione had always hoped she would grow up to be.

"Oh, Mum, I am so glad that I've found you," Rose said as she embraced her mother tightly.

Hermione leant back and regarded her daughter's face. "Darling, is everything all right? It is a little late for a formal call, isn't it?"

"Everything is fine, Mum. Oh, please, don't give me that look. I just need to talk you," Rose declared, smiling at her mother.

No, she isn't just smiling, Hermione realized. Her daughter was glowing with happiness; her dark blue eyes held a sparkle that she hadn't seen there before, and Hermione wasn't able to fight against the tightening in her chest at the sight.

Something had happened, something important.

She regarded her daughter pensively as Severus cleared his throat; he had followed their exchange in silence, so far. His expression was one of indifference, but the slight stiffness in his posture suggested that he felt uncomfortable to be the witness of their mother-daughter display.

"If you'll excuse me now, Professor Granger, I'll retire for the night," he announced, and Hermione had to refuse the urge to roll her eyes at his use of her formal title in front of her daughter.

"Severus, please wait. I would really like to introduce you to each other. Severus, this is my daughter, Rose Weasley. Rose, this Professor Severus Snape, a colleague—" Hermione caught his eyes before she added, "—and a friend."

"Good evening, Professor," Rose said as she reached out her hand, a gesture Severus accepted without hesitation, and Hermione couldn't suppress the rush of satisfaction she felt at their exchange.

"Miss Weasley."

"It's really nice to meet you finally in person, Professor; Mum has told me so much about you already," her daughter added with a genuine smiling.

"Rose," Hermione scolded, embarrassed, her cheeks flushing.

She had thought she had just mentioned him here and there...

"Really, Miss Weasley?" Severus asked and arched an amused eyebrow at Hermione. "How surprising. But as much as I would like to inquire what kind of information about my person your mother has shared with you, I fear this has to wait for another time. If I remember correctly, Miss Weasley, you came here to speak to your mother, and I would like to retire for the evening. Good night."

Before either of them could object, Severus had turned and was sweeping away in a flurry of billowing, black robes while Hermione's amused gaze followed him on his way.

Even at the age of sixty-six, Severus Snape hadn't lost much of his touch.

Once he had vanished into the dungeons, she turned to Rose again, offering her daughter her arm.

"Care for some tea? As Severus rightly reminded us, you came here to talk about something."

Rose smiled and accepted her mother's proffered arm. "Gladly."

Some minutes later, they took their seat on the settee in Hermione's quarters; the flames in the fireplace bathed the living room in a pleasant, warm light.

Rose took a sip of the Ginger tea Winky had brought, before she said, "He is nice, you know."

"Who?"

"Professor Snape. A bit austere, but nice."

Hermione shook her head, amused, sipping some of her tea as well. "Darling, I think you are the first person to use the word 'nice' to describe Severus Snape. But, well, yes he can be quite amiable if he chooses to be."

Rose glanced thoughtfully at her, but Hermione placed her cup of tea on the side table and shook her head, determined to avoid any further elaboration of the subject.

"Darling, you didn't come here to discuss your first impression of Professor Snape with me. Why don't you tell me what was so urgent that you came to Hogwarts to spend a Friday evening with your mother? From the look on your face I know it isn't something bad, so you weren't expelled from university," Hermione said with a wink.

"No, no expulsion so far, Mum." Rose chuckled. However, in a blink of an eye, an expression of sadness crossed her face and she bowed her head slightly, her gaze lingering on the teacup. "But I am not so sure whether some people will repudiate me for what I am intending to do."

Hermione took the cup from her daughter's hands and covered them with her own. "Rose, look at me. There is nothing—do you hear me?—nothing you could ever do that would make me even think about repudiating you in any way, and the same is true of your dad."

She gave her daughter's hand a reassuring squeeze. "Especially, when I can tell that this something is making you happy."

Rose looked up and gave her mother a radiant smile. "It does, or I should better say, he does."

"So?"

Rose took a deep breath. "I am engaged."

Hermione blinked. She couldn't do anything but blink as her gaze fell on the diamond ring on her daughter's left hand.

"I'm going to marry Scorpius, Mum."

"Mum?"

"Mum, did you hear me?"

"I am sorry, darling, what did you say?" Laying the wedding invitation aside, Hermione shook herself from the memory and looked at her daughter who had appeared next to her. Rose's auburn curls fell gracefully around her face and she wore an elegant black, knee-length dress that clung delicately to her slender frame. *How did Ron and I ever create something so beautiful?*

"Muuhm!"

Rose's insistent call jolted her again from her thoughts, and she searched her daughter's gaze.

"I asked if you could help me with my hair. I never get the charm for the updo right."

"Of course." Smiling, Hermione stood up and took her wand from the table. "Turn around."

Rose did as asked, and Hermione seized her daughter's curls with her left hand before she touched them with the tip of her wand, murmuring the spell.

"Thank you, Mum." Rose placed a peck on her cheek. "I am terribly late for this hen night thing. Lily and Victoire are already waiting for me. Are you sure you won't come with us? We will have a lot of fun."

"I am sure you will. Does Roxane join you three, as well?"

A shadow fell over Rose's face, and Hermione already knew the answer, and it made her heart ache. Her cousin wouldn't come, wouldn't celebrate with her, and there could be only one reason why.

"No, eventually she confessed that Uncle George has forbidden her to go," Rose said quietly, confirming Hermione's assumption.

She brushed her daughter's cheek gently. "I am so sorry, darling. I had so hoped they would all come around in the end. Your dad tried so hard to make your uncle see reason."

Rose shook her head, her chin lifted determined. "Mum, I know how hard you both, you and Dad, tried to talk with them all, especially with Grandpa. You know, it doesn't matter to me that they won't be there tomorrow. Not anymore. I am not ashamed of who I love and who loves me in return."

"As you shouldn't be, darling, as you shouldn't be," Hermione said sadly.

After a moment of silence, Rose gave her mother a questioning look, "So, are you coming with me to celebrate?"

"Rose, that's not the kind of party where you should take your old mother." She gave her daughter a feigned painful look as she gestured at herself.

Rose rolled her eyes in return. "Dad is going with Hugo to Scorpius' stag party, too, you know."

But Hermione was saved from another excuse as the fireplace of her house flared green and the voice of Lily Potter called through the flames.

"Gosh. Rose, hurry up. You're pretty enough and we've already been waiting for hours."

"I am coming."

"You'd better!" Lily laughed and vanished from the flames again.

Rose turned to her mother again. "I have to go."

"I heard." Hermione placed her hands upon her daughter's arms and drew her into a quick embrace. "Have fun, darling, and give Lily and Victoire my love."

"I will." Rose smiled, and Hermione was glad that it was a smile that reached her eyes. There hadn't been as many of those smiles in the last months. But now, eventually, as her wedding day was nearing, the smile and the sparkle in her daughter's blue eyes had returned.

She watched Rose throw a hand of Floo powder into the fireplace, calling 'Grimmauld Place', however, she was already about to step through as Hermione was hit by the sudden clarity of the moment, her eyes awash with tears.

Tomorrow.

Tomorrow, her baby girl, her extraordinary daughter, would be married; she had grown up and slipped through her fingers without Hermione truly realising it.

"Rose! Wait!"

Rose turned around and looked at her bemused. "Changed your mind, have you, Mum?"

With a few steps, Hermione crossed the room and cupped her daughter's face with both hands and placed a kiss on her brow.

"I love you, and I am very proud of you."

Rose closed her eyes and leaned her forehead against Hermione's, taking a shaky breath. "I know, Mum. Love you, too."

"Bloody hell, Weasley! Cut the sentimentalities short. We're waiting!"

"And starving!"

Lily's and Victoire's insistent calls echoed once more through the room

Rose laughed and gave Hermione an apologetic grin. "I must, Mum. See you in the morning."

Then she was gone.

