

The Ring on Her Finger

by dracontia

What's in an engagement ring? Love? Commitment? Maybe even a touch of destiny?
A companion piece to the story, 'Return of the Fairy God-Jarvey,' though it is not
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Chapter 1 of 1

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Disclaimer: I only own Rose and her kin. Heck, I don't even own an engagement ring...but only because I told my man he was too daft to marry me if he wanted to spend that much money on a piece of jewelry when what we needed was a house.

First came fire.

Fire was her first memory. Magical jewelers learned to love, respect, know fire. Its very colors were magical, each with its own significance. The spirit of fire was every magical jeweler's partner; only one whose relationship with fire was closer than family could hope to make things in the old way. Straight from St. Mungo's, almost straight from her mother's womb, her father and grandfather set her before the forge. Grandfather was pleased. Unlike his own children, she gazed at the flames enraptured. She did not cry.

Her second memory was metal. Cool silver, warm gold. Copper, warm but wet; gold, warm and dry. The ambient temperature and humidity had nothing to do with it. She had the psychometric sense to tell feminine metals from masculine. She had the makings of a suitable apprentice.

The third memory to impress her deeply was touching the stones. Holding a handful of assorted gems in her left hand, her receptive hand, was like bathing in pure emotion. There were fierce, martial rubies, loving sapphires, soothing, protective jet, and, most curious of all, the cooling moonstones that made the spot on her forehead between her eyes tingle. Many stones had feelings she couldn't yet identify, but that was of no importance. She had the rest of her life to learn them.

When the day came for her to shape her first masterpiece, she knew what it would be. Images of stone and metals interacted in her brain, creating the alchemy that transmutes raw beauty into artful beauty. Different colors of gold twisted and turned in an idea so clear it was almost a vision, creating a cradle for a perfect stone. She told her Master that she was ready. With sure and capable hands, she alloyed gold into the proper colors, then wrought and assembled fine, flat bands, little thicker than wire. He only watched, saying not a word, even when she chose a stone he had always avoided for the setting: a star sapphire, pale compared to its brethren, but possessing a sort of melancholy perfection. His pride in her accomplishment was both that of Master and father.

The ring was deemed a suitable masterpiece by the Guild. She would forever be a Master jeweler.

Having decided to propose to Hermione, Severus was going to do it right. And that meant getting her a ring. Unfortunately, seeing he had scarcely the proverbial two Knuts to rub together, affording the ring would be a bit of a trick. He wasn't going to settle for a transfiguration job. This would have to be the real thing...preferably magical. He'd

have to stretch his resources somehow.

A nagging little voice (sounding suspiciously like Molly Weasley's) suggested that he propose first, then take Hermione shopping for her own ring. With a slight twinge of guilt, he shoved said voice into the nearest metaphorical broom shed. He knew that Hermione would take his financial situation into account, and his ego just wasn't up to watching her swallow her disappointment at having to turn away from 'The Ring' so she could choose from among 'The Affordable Rings.'

It was a damned shame he couldn't do it that way... asking Hermione if she'd care to pick out her engagement ring seemed infinitely easier to say than any variation of 'Will you marry me?'

Even more horrific, she might offer to pay for part or all of her own ring. It struck him that this was exactly the sort of thing a Gryffindor (especially such a practical one as Hermione) would do and would therefore go down in history as one more massive blow to his dignity from a member of said House. That the offer would be utterly free of malice, and issued from the sole living Gryffindor whose respect and esteem he likely couldn't live without, would simply make it a thousand times worse.

Borrowing money would be equally painful. He wasn't keen to be the joke of the week for Gringotts' Goblins. Dealing with a pawnbroker wouldn't be much better. Snape hated to ask for anything; yet another charming feature he had inherited from his dear departed mum, along with magic, unfortunate teeth, and a gloomy, intractable disposition. Among his vividly disagreeable childhood memories was an image of her face, more tight-lipped and haggard than usual, after a trip to Knockturn Alley to pawn what was evidently some sort of family heirloom. It still bothered him, as he was fairly certain the money had paid for his schoolbooks.

Nor was he about to make payments on something. Magical layaway was an absolute bitch. One late or missed payment, and the ring would disappear from her finger. He vividly recalled how the female faculty and a few gossipy male professors...himself excluded, of course...had gone on for weeks about poor Professor Sinistra's vanishing engagement ring, and the resulting messy breakup. (It hadn't helped that she had left the High Table in the middle of breakfast to send her fiancé a Howler... Couldn't the witch have managed more discretion than that?)

He refused to go to Draco. Snape had no idea of the exact situation, but gathered that a great deal of Malfoy money and a few employees of the family had gone permanently missing in the absence of Lucius' sharp eye. Draco didn't discuss the matter, but he had gone so far as to ask Severus (in an overly casual fashion) to help him make inquiries into mobile phones and Muggle businesses. That was quite a frightening line of thought, actually. A Malfoy willing to do business with Muggles... The former top Slytherin preparing to engage a Gryffindor (and not in the sense of an invitation to duel)... If Snape heard anything about Longbottom brewing a potion correctly, he would forget about the whole marriage thing and simply brace himself for the Apocalypse. Just to be on the safe side, he waited a week for any other news suggestive of impending doom. None was forthcoming.

Economizing and saving it would be.

Six months later, the pittance he was able to set aside only amounted to a larger pittance. He'd like to wait a bit longer and afford something better, but not long after the rather torrid little interlude in the lav at the last Ministry function, Hermione had begun to seem restless. It was beginning to look like now or never, and he was increasingly disinclined to accept 'never' as an answer.

Of course, shopping for the ring meant... actually shopping. Not for books, potions ingredients, groceries, or other such necessities of life, but *fojewelry*. He sighed at the book he was holding, which had been serving no purpose other than to keep his hands from wringing each other for the past half hour. Were Snape flush with Galleons, he would still be reluctant to shop for magical jewelry, simply because it was something about which he knew very little. He couldn't be certain if the properties of cauldron and stirring rod metals, and stones used as ingredients translated at all into magical jewelry-making. Since the staff of nearly every magical library and bookstore seemed to know him by the sound of his breathing, consulting books on the subject was out...not unless he wanted the rumor mill to propose to Hermione on his behalf before he ever found a ring. So cowardly... yet so tempting...

There was nothing for it but to put himself at the mercy of some bloody clerk...anonymously, of course. He dropped the book like an insensitive boor snubbing his date for a more desirable dance partner and disguised his appearance with a few basic glamours before Apparating. He would start by shopping for a magical Jeweler.

After walking Diagon Alley for over an hour and a half, Snape was frustrated as all hell. The jewelers were either insufferably pretentious-looking vault-like establishments or sported at least one window display of gaudy little baubles beneath charmed cupids shooting at floating hearts. The former would wreck his budget. The latter set his teeth on edge.

He'd have to consider Hogsmeade, even though he was reluctant to acquaint himself with the region. There were magical neighborhoods in Wales and Ireland known for decent jewelers, but the wizards there were notorious for wanting to conduct business in their native tongue. It would be a nuisance to look up every odd magical shop in the Isles. Before committing himself to a frustrating day of Apparitions and translation spells, a quick look down Knockturn Alley was in order.

Not too far from the respectable storefronts of Diagon Alley, he encountered the most likely shop he'd seen yet. Moore and Mraz's may have been located in Knockturn Alley, but it had a look about it that desperately screamed, 'We're respectable craftsmen...only here because of the rents!' Granted, it had an inconspicuous three balls clustered on the signpost in front of the door, but in Knockturn Alley, those probably came with the building. Even the warehouses here offered pawn services...so he'd heard.

The proprietress seemed to bear out his assessment of the establishment's grasp after legitimacy. The look she gave him was apprehensive, and not in the "Will I need to hide the dodgy stuff?" manner; more like "Is he a customer or is he casing the place?" Not that Severus imagined the witch had much about which to be nervous. She looked like a brunette, bespectacled Molly Weasley and was probably about as defenseless.

Or perhaps she just needed the loo. "Rose, see to the customer," she whispered to the young witch at the worktable in the corner as she ducked into the back room.

Rose, taller than the older witch by about a head and no more than half as wide, doffed her gloves and protective glasses as she rose from her work. Despite the marked difference in proportions, there was a distinct family resemblance. He wasn't sure why the elder Mraz or Moore feared thieves; he guessed the younger witch could sort them. The girl sported a politely watchful expression and a palmed wand. The only other person he had ever seen wear all denim robes was Charlie Weasley, so they were most likely not the fashion statement of a shrinking violet.

"Welcome to Mraz and Moore, sir. I am Miss Mraz...how may I assist you?" the young witch asked, her tone pleasantly brisk.

"I'm looking for an engagement ring," he said simply, internally adding, *and I hope your selection is as inexpensive as your location implies...*

She tapped the display case and the contents reorganized themselves so that only ranks of rings in little velvet nests were visible. "Prices for betrothal bands start at 150 Galleons. I'd like to say the sky's the limit, but we don't carry much above 3,000," she said, smiling apologetically.

Severus drew on years of years of disguising gut reactions, hiding his choke of shock in a cough. There were rings that sold for 3,000 Galleons? Or MORE?

Darting an appraising glance at his out-of-date robes, she added, "The rings are arranged by price; most economical on the left to the luxury models on the far right, and by type of stone within each range. We also make to suit. All rings are cleared of non-native magical energy after construction and kept pure until purchase, when a sizing charm is added. As you can see, we only employ traditional magical stones. We do not stock diamond betrothal rings, but there's a bit of a mania for them in the Muggle world, so we can produce one...if that is desired..." she trailed off with a disdainful half-shrug.

Magical jewelers trained in the old school apparently had little patience for modern fashions in gems. That suited him. He couldn't come up with the price of a decent sized diamond if he traded in his soul (which, admittedly, was in considerably used condition).

Ye gods... What if Hermione was sufficiently interested in current Muggle fashion to want a diamond rather than a more traditional stone? "Just out of curiosity... is there any traditional use for diamond in a betrothal ring?" he asked.

"Well, sir, they usually aren't given to the bride to be... unless she's on the older side." At his puzzled frown, the corners of her lips quirked ever so slightly. "They have been historically popular with older wizards marrying *much* younger witches. In those cases, the ring was for him." The amused glint in her eyes above her otherwise professional expression dared him to enter into a discussion of the magical relationship between diamonds and sexual vitality.

Nice to finally discover why Lucius Malfoy, conspicuous consumer extraordinaire, had always Disillusioned that diamond pinky ring.

Evidently Miss Mraz decided that Severus was a legitimate customer, because she actually asked if he'd care for a closer look at the merchandise. He noticed, however, that she stopped short of removing the baubles on the far right from the display case. Was he that transparently broke, or could the girl see straight through a patron's pockets?

Fortunately, he was not forced to appear as if he knew what he was doing whilst studying the glittering array of colored metals and stones; the young artisan launched into an explanation of the various metals, their composition, and the properties of metals and stones without any prompting. Rather logical, actually. He couldn't be the only wizard clueless about jewelry in general, and engagement rings in particular.

"Traditional engagement rings are gold, a masculine metal, set with one or more feminine stones. Depending on the alloy, a variety of color effects can be achieved with gold. Since engagement rings are almost never removed, we do not recommend silver unless the lady insists upon a feminine metal and doesn't mind high maintenance jewelry. If the look of silver is desired, we recommend white gold; if the magical properties of silver are important, green gold has the highest silver content. As pure gold is too soft to withstand daily wear, most of it is alloyed with harder metals." She added, "Bicolor rings that combine masculine and feminine metals are well regarded by progressive witches."

Hermione was definitely a progressive witch. Snape mentally disqualified all rings that were not bicolor. He was feeling a little more comfortable now that it was apparent his knowledge of metals in reference to potions making applied here, after all. If only he could afford the materials to research the effects of green gold vs. white gold cauldrons...

"Pureblood families with the Galleons lean towards feminine pearls in a rope-like setting of very pure masculine gold...a fragile combination that is utterly impractical for a witch who has to do anything more strenuous than greet visitors and pour tea," she continued.

That explained the Gobstone-sized monstrosity on Narcissa's finger. More Malfoy jewelry mysteries solved.

"Amber and carnelian are masculine stones, conducive to promoting sexual energy. Amber is also associated with fertility, whilst carnelian is a powerful confidence builder. They are both useful for helping the proverbial 'blushing bride' get over her shyness."

Hmph. Hermione certainly didn't need amber or carnelian. She had no problems with shyness and if she were any more energetic in bed she might bloody well need a diamond. As for fertility... Sweet Astarte, he was just getting up the balls to propose.

"Amethysts are quite popular. They are deeply magical stones in general and have strong ties to romantic commitment in particular. They are one of the few stones traditional for a witch to give to her wizard, but they are equally fitting in jewelry for witches. It's hard to go far wrong with an Amethyst, so we deal in them quite a lot."

Amethysts sounded promising. Though Severus had no strong feelings for them, the fact that they comprised a fair amount of the stock on the left (less expensive) side of the case was a strong argument in favor of the pleasingly purple stone.

"Moonstones and beryls are feminine stones. They have a reputation for encouraging harmony between lovers and good communication in general. Their strongest association is with Divination, however, so they are an excellent choice for the witch keen on that field."

Hermione's disdain for Divination exceeded his own and she would probably prefer something a little less Slytherin-looking than a green or silver stone. So much for selecting a beryl or moonstone.

"Sapphires are an excellent stone for engagement rings, having strong associations with sexual fidelity and emotional harmony. They are ideal for the modern professional witch, as only ruby equals its durability, and only diamond exceeds it. Generally speaking, star sapphires are the most magically powerful, so we try to make most of our sapphire jewelry from star sapphire cabochons. For centuries, they have been considered the ideal lover's stone."

Severus found himself liking the sapphires, particularly the star sapphires with their mesmerizing asterism. Sadly, they were probably also the most expensive stones in the case, saving those poncey pearls. He didn't see many of them on the left.

"Lapis Lazuli and turquoise are fine traditional stones for betrothal rings and even wedding bands, easily equal to Sapphire in terms of their suitability. They have strong associations with fidelity between lovers, as well as healing. We do recommend protective charms, which must be renewed periodically, for rings containing these stones. Turquoise in particular can suffer color damage by exposure to extreme conditions or certain potions."

With an inward sigh, Severus disqualified lapis and turquoise. They were tempting... appropriate to her vocation, and the colors were charming. But the only bicolor ring set with Lapis left him cold, and although turquoises reminded him of that dress she wore to the fateful ball, they were simply too fragile for Hermione to wear at work. He'd rather not have to encumber her ring with layers of charms to protect the stone.

"I'll go with either amethyst or sapphire, in a bicolor setting," he said, and she nodded respectfully, tapping the counter with her wand and causing the disqualified rings to whisk back into their places. "And, ah, it has to be under 300 Galleons," he added, cringing inwardly as his brain scoffed, *Yes, definitely...especially since you've only got 225 to spend...*

Miss Mraz tapped the counter again, admirably containing her disappointment but for a flicker of resignation in her eyes. There was suddenly very little in the way of blue amongst the stones remaining for consideration, and the bands were a little thin.

He had somewhat reluctantly narrowed the choice down to the pear-shaped faceted amethyst in a yellow and green gold setting and a white gold ring studded with amethyst cabochons, yellow gold rails...when a twinkle of blue caught his eye.

The sapphire was small, but still impressive. Its tiny four-pointed star floated softly over a pale blue background. Fine threads of multicolored gold cradled the gleaming cabochon. They were twisted into a sort of mobius circle, one set white gold backed with green, the other set yellow gold backed with red, so that one half of the ring appeared to be yellow and green, the other red and silver. The sapphire sat in the little gap made by their twist, hiding the point at which the colors joined. It was clearly designed to impel the viewer to tilt the ring, changing the angle and showing off the asterism to best effect. If only the stone were a shade closer to that sky-like turquoise... and if the thing cost less than 225 Galleons...

"Could the color on that small sapphire be altered...brightened up...just a bit?" Severus asked, unable to take his eyes off the ring as the young witch drew the little velvet nest from the tray. He found himself clasping his hands behind his back in an effort to refrain from reaching out and touching the thing. The last time he'd felt such a strong impulse to put his hands on something that wasn't yet his, Hermione was still just an ex-student who had the maddening habit of bending rather lower than was strictly necessary to reach for the cream during their tea-time meetings.

She pulled a rotating charmed loupe from a pocket in her robes and seated the straps carefully on her straggly, mousy locks. The young artisan studied the sapphire for long minutes, rotating several lenses before her right eye and adjusting the bead of light on the left side of the device before nodding approvingly. "This stone is perfectly suited for color adjustment. The refraction is strong, so the asterism shouldn't be diminished. It's smallish for a star sapphire, but it's one of the best I've ever had the pleasure of setting. Took me a week to figure out the perfect ring design to show off its qualities. You'd be getting a bargain on this one, no mistake...200 Galleons, plus twenty five to transfigure the color."

Snape decided he would ignore the strong, cynical suspicion that this witch had known exactly how much money he had to spend from the second he walked into the store

and had tailored the stock offered accordingly, in favor of elation and relief that he could afford the ring that he felt so strongly about.

"I'll need you to select the color from the Prismaticorb," she continued, withdrawing a small crystal ball from one of her numerous pockets. "Hold it in your right hand and concentrate on the color."

He complied, causing the crystal to glow with the desired shade. She fixed her eyes on it intently for several long moments, then gave a sharp nod and focused a cannon-like lens from the loupe on the ring. Shaking her wand into her hand with a practiced flick of her wrist, she wordlessly directed a stream of magic into the stone. Snape had the oddest feeling he was watching something akin to the point at which a potion reaches completion... an ineffable combination of human magical intent and the harnessing of the raw magical power coursing through creation.

"There, sir," she said with an immense air of satisfaction as she turned off the light on her loupe, added the sizing charm, and slipped her wand back into its holster (a popular duelist's model, he noticed). Sweet Hermes, how many times *had* the place been robbed? A neat leather box was Summoned, the ring inserted, and she held it out to him in a manner that did not quite invite him to take it. Oh, right...he had to pay for it first...

The perfection of the color was entrancing. Severus gazed at it in ill-disguised delight as he handed over the entire money pouch with amazingly little trepidation, and she counted it with incredible speed and discretion. With utmost reluctance he closed the box and stowed it in an inner pocket.

As he was turning to leave, she called softly, "Oh, Mr. Snape? You needn't worry. I will neither broadcast your visit here, nor its purpose. But for future reference, you might like to know that a magical jeweler's loupe can see through any glamour."

Snape was almost angry enough to Obliviate the girl. Not fair, really, seeing as how he had only himself to blame for not considering something of that sort. But since when had he been fair?

However, he settled for asking warily, "How can I be certain of your discretion?"

"Along with quality of workmanship and artistic integrity, it's the cornerstone of our business. Let's just say that not all married Wizards buying jewelry are giving it to their wives. That class of customer doesn't want to be seen in The Golden Leaf," she replied, curling her lip in disgust. "We charge those bastards triple...more, if we think they can come up with it," she added.

Snape wasn't certain why he decided to take her at her word. Most likely it was not because she plainly had her wand at the ready as well, though she attempted to hide that fact by using the classic Durmstrang dueling posture. Definitely not a stance employed by one unsure of their abilities. Perhaps it was because she had voluntarily advised him about the properties of loupes. Maybe it was because he hadn't taught her, and therefore had no disagreeable recollections of her classroom performance. Or was it that she came across as a young witch who, remarkably, was not an apparent dunderhead?

Maybe he just approved of her excellent sneer at the mention of rich arseholes who couldn't be bothered to be faithful to their wives.

In any event, he sheathed his wand and gave her a nod of farewell. She returned the gesture, and he exited the shop feeling absolutely confident that he had the perfect ring to give Hermione.

Now, if only he could figure out what to say to her...

Hermione was admiring her engagement ring for possibly the thousandth time that week. Just glancing at it during her exams had been as soothing as taking a Calming Draught, without any adverse effects to alertness and recall. Which was a good thing, considering the stress involved in the proposal. She was so caught up in watching the play of the asterism that it took a moment for her to register the fact that her fiancé had joined her on the sofa.

Severus didn't blame Hermione for her fascination with the ring. He couldn't quite keep himself from glancing at it periodically whenever they were together. It was probably just the fact that it showed she was his and no mistake. Still, he couldn't help but think there was a little something more to it than that. Sapphires must be powerful conduits of love, indeed.

"You know, I've been doing some research...what are you laughing at?" Hermione asked, in response to Severus' snort.

"That's rather like saying you've been breathing a bit lately, my dear," he purred at her, highly amused.

"I know it's an effort, my love, but do stop being a prat for a few moments and listen to me," she huffed.

"I don't have to stop being a prat to listen," he asserted, smirking as he deliberately plucked her curls to watch them spring back.

She rolled her eyes at him. "And an immature prat, at that," she sighed, but continued. "Specifically, I've been researching magical jewelry. I found out a bit about Moore and Mraz, the shop whose name was on the box. They have quite a history...supposedly they're descended from the Gofannon smiths who made jewelry for the druids. The first time the business was registered with any type of guild was at the time of the third crusade, when a North African lapidarist married into the family and the name Moros, later Moore, appears. The name Mraz comes into the business sometime in the late 1940s, when a refugee from the Tatra mountains apprenticed to the surviving Moore brother, eventually marrying into the family."

"I think I shall have to treat this bauble with respect. It appears to have come from a pedigreed family," Severus remarked, brushing his lips across the stone before nibbling his way up the hand wearing it.

Hermione paused in her dissertation to re-situate herself in his lap, which he met with a hum of approval. "The interesting thing is, they don't use charms on their jewelry the way modern magical jewelers do. Their stock pieces depend upon the properties of the gems, metals, and some very old magical smelting and shaping processes. They only incorporate incantations into the construction process for bespoke work...invisibility rings and the like."

"They can make invisibility rings?" Snape was sufficiently distracted to look up from her wrist. Perhaps the business was in Knockturn Alley for dubious purposes after all.

"Yes...they're currently the only jewelers in Britain licensed by the Ministry to do so," Hermione explained.

"Well, that would explain why they aren't prospering. The number of Wizards willing to register with the Ministry for the legal possession of an invisibility ring is probably comparable to the number who are still willing to admit they were friends with the Goyle," he remarked, resuming his ministrations about halfway up her forearm. The business was a little too reputable for its own good, it would seem. "Although they would constitute two decidedly separate factions of the Wizarding community."

"It averages out to .75 a year," she admitted. "But each one costs a small fortune, so they get by. By the way, you missed a spot," she added, directing him with a gentle caress to his cheek.

"Not that you need any reason, pet, but what moved you to pursue this particular line of research?" he asked. His interest in the conversation was flagging slightly as he reveled in her delicate shiver at his tonguing the inside of her elbow.

"I always feel so close to you and so secure when I wear it, I wondered if there was some sort of charm on it that causes us to feel more connected," she confessed. "I've become rather addicted to the feeling, so much so that I can't bear to take it off for any reason. It's a good thing the stone doesn't take any damage from washing," she said, pausing a moment to nuzzle his hair.

"I read up on magical engagement rings. There are such things as Fidelity Charms, but Moore and Mraz doesn't use them and I can't see the power of sapphire alone accounting for such a strong effect. Aside from charms, the only other reference I could find to such phenomenon is in the use of heirloom jewelry. Sometimes gemstones

will stay in a family for generations, becoming so entrenched in the family's magical energy that they become known as 'blood heirloom stones.' They're almost never lost, even if the jewelry is broken up and redesigned. Old families worried about their sons making suitable matches often have them set into engagement rings. Only a fiancée who met their standards would be able to comfortably wear the ring."

Severus whispered softly against her neck, "I doubt that would be a factor. If my mother had any heirloom jewelry, it was all pawned before I knew about it. Probably before the girl who made your ring was born." The thought crossed his mind that there was no reason the ring couldn't become a family heirloom. But since they weren't married as yet, he wasn't quite comfortable suggesting the notion of... heirs.

"I still find it amazing how profoundly close to you I feel, just by looking at the stone," Hermione sighed, beginning to find it hard to concentrate on speech. *How'd* he do that thing to her earlobe? "But I suppose it's just the properties of the sapphire... magnified several thousand times by how much I love the man who gave it to me," she concluded, smiling warmly at him as he released her ear to gaze into her eyes. With an enticing wiggle, she managed to re-situate herself astride his lap.

Severus showed his approval of her conclusion with a kiss. Neither of them noticed the intense glow of the sapphire on Hermione's finger for the next few hours. After all, they had a missed weekend of 'let's celebrate our engagement sex' to make up.

It was the end of the month, and in the tiny office above the Moore and Mraz Magical Jewelers, the month's accounts were being tallied.

"I still can't believe you sold your first Master Work ring," Marian Mraz (nee Moore) scolded her daughter.

Rose snorted. "Because you think I should have kept it for sentimental reasons, or because every other customer has shied away from the thing as if it were cursed?"

Truth be told, she felt a little guilty about offering the ring for sale. One of the last things Otecko had done before he died was accompany her when she submitted it to the Jeweler's Guild so she could be made a Master Jeweler and partner in the business. But Jozef Mraz had been as much a businessman and family man as an artist; he would have approved of his daughter's first masterpiece paying the rent and thus keeping the shop going and the roof over their heads another month. That softened the blow.

"Both, actually. I think the witch who pawned the brooch from which the sapphire came must have placed some particularly strong charm on it. Many customers do, trying to ensure that the piece gets back to them one day," she explained unnecessarily.

"Yes, Mum... Otecko taught me that, oh, I don't know, right after 'Bozemoj, don't get near the forge without your dragon hide gloves.' That's why we break up dead pawn and make it over instead of trying to re-sell it as is," Rose replied pettishly. "Mere charms can't survive the process, and no one's likely to pawn a blood-heirloom stone with us."

She knew Mum hated hearing that. The Moore family had produced many important magical jewelers back in the days when the natural powers of metals and stones were considered more prestigious than custom metal charms. The reason Mum and Granddad still officially gave for remaking, rather than selling, dead pawn was 'artistic integrity.' Artistic integrity was great...she was an artist too, damn it...but so were paying the rent and eating.

"It's not like I said it loud enough for Granddad to hear," she murmured by way of apology. Master Jeweler Richard Moore, though still as keen-eyed and manually adept as ever, was deaf as a doorknob and refused to wear his ear trumpet while working. He insisted the enchantments on it interfered with those on the loupe. They could have been having the conversation using a Sonorous Spell and he wouldn't have picked up a word.

"Still, I do wish you had taken the customer's name when you made out the sales slip for that ring," Mrs. Mraz fretted. "I should like to have seen if he had any connection to the woman who pawned it."

"Give over, Mum. If we started taking names, every third one would be Merlinus Smythe. He was just another poor osuchany wizard with more taste than Galleons," she responded, rolling her eyes. "Even for pawns, we only take initials and rely on the numbered tickets to match up." She wasn't about to break confidentiality, even to Mum.

Despite her dismissive comments, Rose's curiosity was piqued. After a few fits and starts with the ear trumpet, managed to get her question across to Granddad. He couldn't recall precisely, but he was fairly certain the brooch had been a silver dragon with a star sapphire eye. It was pawned some time between Mum marrying Otecko and Uncle Lorenz dying in a broom crash. That would have made it the summer of 1971.

That night she went through the dusty old files of unclaimed pawn slips. The chances of them keeping a slip for a long broken-up piece of dead pawn were small, but Otecko had been an obsessive record keeper, and no one had bothered his meticulous files since his untimely death. The brooch had been pawned before she was born, had sat in the vault through her childhood, and had been declared abandoned during her brief stint at Durmstrang. By the time she returned to apprentice as a magical jeweler with Otecko and Granddad, all that was left of it was the stone and a little ingot that incorporated its silver.

Miraculously, she found the correct pawn stub. In Grandfather Moore's slender, delicate script, as elegant as his jewelry designs, it read 'Small silver brooch...shape of Welsh Green...Star Sapphire eye. 45 Galleons.'

Rose whistled. Either the piece had been an extraordinary antique, or the witch pawning it had a particularly sad story (or both). But she was none the wiser as to the mysterious beneficiary of Grandfather's generosity. All the ticket bore besides the description, date, and number were faint initials scrawled in the customer's spiky, cramped cursive. It was hard to make out, but the letters seemed to be 'E.', 'P.', and the last...perhaps a thin, tentative-looking 'S.'

Author's Note:

Dead pawn: a technical term used by pawnbrokers to describe an item or items that have been pawned for cash but never redeemed, and therefore subject to being sold.

The scene where Severus purchases the ring was originally written for the story 'Return of the Fairy God-Jarvey.' I ultimately decided to drop it in the interests of comedic flow. But something about that star sapphire kept nagging at the back of my mind, so I decided to do a little research...which revealed enough for a little tale all its own. And here it is.

All of the properties of gems and metals mentioned in this story were carefully researched so as to construct magically appropriate engagement rings. So ladies, if you're with an older fellow who's slowing down a bit, you might want to consider getting him a diamond ring (or at least carnelian) for his birthday! * wink *

Rose's Slovak Vocabulary:

Otecko: Daddy

Bozemoj: My God, Good Heavens

Osuchany: shabby, ragged, worn...especially of clothing