

There are a thousand pieces of this jigsaw puzzle, and every one that finds its place is a piece of me I've taken back from you.

Once complete, it will reveal a birds eye view of Venice, the cobbled streets we walked together, the canals we crossed in darkness. Once complete, I will reveal myself, my smile emerging effortless and unbidden. I will have no need of you.

Every weekday looks the same during a pandemic: get up at the sound my alarm, shake off my dreams of you. I swallow down a pill with breakfast, to quell my constant worries, to ease the thoughts of us.

Work for 8 hours, take a walk at lunch. There is too much unfilled time, too much space to be reminded of you.

I eat a hastily prepared dinner, brew another cup of tea.

The evenings are my own, the lounge room lit as bright as I can make it. Ophelia sleeps in the box beside me. Some nights I sit at the table so long that her purr becomes my lullaby, and I wake with pieces of Venice stuck to my face, reminded instantly of my ongoing failure. If we were a jig-saw puzzle, I wouldn't stop until I'd put us back together.

Ophelia, my only company, senses the theme of my thoughts with feline magic. She rubs her face against mine, whiskers tickling my cheek, until I scratch between her ears. Until I remember that her affection is a constant, while yours was fickle as the wind.

My sister calls every Friday, a telephone check up that replaces our usual dinner outing. She asks how I am.

"Getting there," I tell her.

I don't tell her that hers is the only human voice I've heard all day, or that the sense of connection brings tears to my eyes. It will only make her worry about me, and she does enough of that already.

"How's the puzzle going?" She asks.

I've been sending her weekly pictures of my progress, but she enquires every time.

"It's going well. I'm over halfway." I don't tell her that I think I'm starting to let you go. She thinks I've done that already; she never approved of you.

"Oh, and Billy says hi!" I can hear my nephew in the background, calling my name. The sound is muffled for a moment, and then his voice is in my ear.

"Miss you, aunty Liz!"

We end the call, and Billy's young, unfiltered love offers a brief and powerful respite from the numbing repetition. I'm still smiling when I return to the puzzle.

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The weekends drag, painful in their lack of purpose. I sleep in as long as my body will allow. Unconscious, I pretend that nothing has changed and you are with me still, your hand in mine the perfect piece of a different puzzle.

It's been a whole calendar month spent inside for me, and two calendar months without you. Eventually I'll stop counting the days, but until then I'll sit over a wooden table marred with dents and scratches from years of family meals, in a room that sometimes feels so heavy with memories that I can barely move.

You and I lived here together, once, but there's no point dwelling on that. Instead, I put one jigsaw piece beside another, trusting that change will come with time and work.

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A week later, when I have just a handful of pieces left to put in place, there's a loud, insistent knock at the door.

For a moment, my heart soars: have you defied the danger and the law to see me; could you have changed your mind?

Of course not. There's a parcel on my porch, and a delivery truck backing down the driveway.

I gingerly open the parcel, trying to touch as little of the outside as possible.

There's a puzzle inside, a thousand pieces of the Sydney Opera House, and a note from my sister:

*Hope this one keeps you busy! Remember how we used to say we'd go to Sydney together? We should do that, when all this is over. Send me pictures when you've started. xx*

I go back inside, sit at the table and pull out my phone to thank her.

You and I talked of going to Sydney together. We talked of so many things, and none of them will happen now.

We couldn't see each other for at least a few months, even if we wanted to – even if *you* chose to suggest it, because decisions about us were always yours to make, weren't they? You imagined our beginning and you typed our end, an email I could recite in my sleep.

Finally, here is a choice that I can make: move on.

My cursor hovers over the blue-lit rubbish bin, ready to erase your words from their virtual existence in my inbox, if not from the depths of my mind.

I turn away from the screen, twist my hair into tight, anxiety ringlets. Text one friend, and then my sister. I need multiple sources of advice for this. They both tell me the same thing: *Delete it. It's time to let her go.*

Finally, I click the button and make my choice.

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I order a frame online. It's ornate and ostentatious, and everything I usually avoid. This is an achievement that deserves to be celebrated, and this is a time for boldness, for stepping out of life with you and into life *for me*.

The glue takes time to set, seeping slowly through the tiny gaps between each piece. Perhaps this is how my healing works: gradually, with every joyous, gracious moment seeping through the cracks you left, pulling me back together.

After an hour or two, I reach out gingerly and poke the puzzle, feeling the pieces shift beneath my fingers. Nearly there, not quite settled yet. I poke myself with the same curiosity, conjuring memories of you. The pain is there, but distantly: we're not quite over yet.

The next day, I check it again, and the pieces remain in place. It slides easily into the frame, hangs proudly on the wall.

The puzzle is finished, and so are we.

The puzzle is finished. It is whole, and so am I.