

on ALTHEA, who stands in limbo downstage under a pin spot. She holds glasses of pink lemonade, one in each hand, and speaks directly to the audience.) **START**

ALTHEA. With a puzzle of this size, it's crucial for one to develop a very focused strategy. You simply *have* to have a strategy or you'll be fumbling around for hours without making any progress at all. Now, mine isn't unique. Maybe you do this yourself. You isolate all the straight-edge pieces. You put all the others aside so you can work your border first. You have to finish your border to get your bearings. Then you work inward from the border, moving methodically toward the middle, expanding your pockets of color. Now, I know there are other ways to approach a jigsaw puzzle, but this one has always worked for me: creating a frame, a nice frame for your picture. Pictures need frames, don't you think?

(In a conspiratorial whisper.)

I have to get back to the basement. You see, I don't have much time. Ina is coming for me tomorrow afternoon.

END *(She leaves the spot and returns to the basement where lights come back up. LEIF is working away. Note: from here until the end of the play, when characters are stationed at the ping pong table they will - unless directed otherwise - be working on the puzzle. The dialogue, though quite often about everything but the puzzle itself, will very rarely pull them from the fundamental task of completing their collaborative enterprise.)*

(Continued, handing LEIF one of the glasses of lemonade.) Did you reach your wife, dear?

LEIF. Thank you. No. She's probably still at her sister's. We need better light. That bulb's pretty dim.