

ALTHEA. And then you've got your insomniacs. And there are those who listen just for the company, I think.

(LEIF *nods.*)

The voices can be a comfort. The quiet – that late night quiet: after all this time I still haven't gotten used to it.

LEIF. I'm not sure I could get used to it either.

ALTHEA. Well, you go on home to your wife. Do you like the house?

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LEIF. It's a very nice house. ← **START**

ALTHEA. You can say it's not for you. I won't mind, really. Some people object to the bay window.

LEIF. The bay window is a nice feature.

ALTHEA. Some say it looks – what was it that one fellow called it? – “*imposed.*” He said my bay window looked imposed. He preferred one more “organic.”

LEIF. I'm not quite sure what— [that means]

ALTHEA. I think it means he didn't like the house. But someone will come along who will appreciate it. Someone who likes a house with a certain “lived in” quality. Don't you get that feeling? That “lived in” feeling? It's like buying pre-washed jeans, isn't it?

LEIF. (*Smiling.*) You could say that.

(*Indicating the “puzzles” cabinet.*)

Your family liked jigsaw puzzles.

ALTHEA. Oh, it was a weekend ritual. For a time. Then Reed – that was my husband – Reed and Collin – well, they just got too busy. Places to go. People to see. Jigsaw puzzles take time, you know. Time and infinite patience.

(LEIF *gravitates toward the puzzle cabinet.*)

LEIF. I have the patience. Never have the time, though.

ALTHEA. Places to go. People to see. I believe a person has to *make* the time.

LEIF. (*Poking around.*) A *lot* of time judging from the number of pieces in some of these boxes.

ALTHEA. I kept working the puzzles for a while after my husband and son stopped. But it wasn't the same. Jigsaw puzzles can be enjoyable solitary endeavors, but I prefer to approach them more communally, if you know what I mean.

LEIF. Here's one with two-thousand pieces!

ALTHEA. (*Correcting him with a gentle shake of the head.*) One-thousand-nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine. Reed considered suing the manufacturer. To have come so far, it was beyond cruel.

LEIF. (*Inventorying the other boxes.*) Two-thousand. Twenty-five hundred.

ALTHEA. Open the doors at the bottom.

LEIF. What's in there?

ALTHEA. You'll see.

(*LEIF opens the cabinet doors as instructed.  
His hands fall on a large box.*)

LEIF. (*Examining it.*) Three-thousand. This must be a record.

ALTHEA. You just might be right.

LEIF. (*Pulling it out.*) Three-thousand pieces. Just where would you work a puzzle this big?

ALTHEA. It actually fits right here. On this ping pong table.

LEIF. You've worked it before? But the box doesn't look like it's ever been opened.

ALTHEA. I took measurements.

LEIF. And then you changed your mind.

ALTHEA. (*Smiling.*) I did. I chickened out. A three-thousand-piece puzzle is quite intimidating. But it's a pretty picture, don't you think? The Grand Canal in Venice. Isn't it beautiful?

LEIF. I like the colors. I like puzzles with lots of colors.

ALTHEA. Open it up.

LEIF. I'm really tempted.

(*ALTHEA encourages him with a nod. He gets the lid off the box.*)

ALTHEA. Did you work puzzles when you were a child?

LEIF. Off and on. I was an ambivalent puzzle worker.

ALTHEA. Why do you say that?

LEIF. Well, I liked the feeling of accomplishment that came when all the pieces got put together, but there was also a certain, you know, *letdown*.

ALTHEA. That it was over.

LEIF. Right – and the fact that the final product was really kind of – I don't know – kind of *impractical*. It wasn't something you could use, you know?

ALTHEA. Well, you could *look* at it, couldn't you? You could take a – a – take an aesthetic view of the thing.

LEIF. Like, hmm, like a piece of art you put together.

ALTHEA. You've got it! ← **END**

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LEIF. But the "getting there" – that was fun too. Like the way looking *forward* to Christmas always kind of felt better than Christmas itself.

ALTHEA. So, you enjoyed the communal aspect of puzzle-working yourself.