

Look at me. My hand's shaking. I'm - I'm twelve years old again, and there's Aunt Edith upstairs with the gravelly voice and the goiter.

*(LEIF goes to CONNIE and puts his arm around her.)*

LEIF. *(Delicately.)* Your Aunt Edith's dead, pumpkin. She can never hurt you again.

CONNIE. She never hurt me. She just creeped me out. God, I need sleep.

MATTIE. Look! You've got a pigeon in your hand! Its wings are fluttering.

*(As CONNIE holds up the puzzle piece to examine it closer, ALTHEA enters. She is accompanied by INA GLUCK.)*

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START INA. *(To the three puzzle workers.)* Good morning.

*(Ad libbed "hello" and "good morning" from the trio.)*

ALTHEA. *(To INA.)* I give you: "the Puzzle Platoon." All present and accounted for, though not quite as bright-eyed and bushy-tailed as we'd like.

*(She stifles a yawn. To the others, indicating INA.)*

She didn't believe me.

INA. *(To ALTHEA.)* All night?

LEIF. Since early yesterday evening.

ALTHEA. *(Admiring the puzzle.)* It's really coming along.

*(To CONNIE.)*

Oh, look. You're moving back to the water. That's fine! It's your forte, dear.

INA. Are you going to introduce me to these people, Althea?

ALTHEA. I'm sorry. People, this is my sister, Ina. Ina, this is Mattie, but you've met her before.

INA. I don't recall.

MATTIE. I was out in the yard and we talked about roses and I - I - I wasn't looking where I was pointing the hose, and it got your feet all wet.

*(After a beat, shamefaced.)*

They were brand new shoes. You said.

INA. Yes, I remember. You live next door.

MATTIE. With Mr. Puss.

INA. With the cat, yes.

*(Back to ALTHEA.)*

And your other friends -

ALTHEA. Connie and Leif Morrell.

INA. I don't believe Althea's ever mentioned the two of you.

LEIF. *(To INA.)* We just met your sister last night. We decided to help her work this mother-of-all-jigsaw-puzzles, and then on our way out, we plan to rob her blind.

*(INA's eyes bug out in surprise.)*

CONNIE. My husband is kidding.

ALTHEA. *(To INA.)* Leif and Connie are thinking about buying the house.

INA. I see.

LEIF. It's a beautiful house. We haven't gone over it with the proverbial fine-tooth comb, but we like what we've seen so far. We do understand, however, that the hot water heater may need to be replaced. Are you about to take Althea away or could you perhaps come back around three, maybe four o'clock to do the dirty deed?

INA. Dirty deed?

LEIF. Her official incarceration.

*(Now ALTHEA's eyes widen. CONNIE is also taken aback by LEIF's sudden truculence.)*

CONNIE. Leif, let's go upstairs. I want to talk to you about the house.

LEIF. We aren't gonna talk about the house. We're gonna talk about the fact that I have this sudden, overwhelming need to keep Althea from moving in with her sister.

CONNIE. *Leif!*

ALTHEA. Leif, dear—I appre -

MATTIE. *(Caught up in the moment; a chant.) Hell no! She won't go! Hell no! She won't go!*

ALTHEA. *(Overlapping.)* Mattie, please!

INA. *(To ALTHEA, indicating LEIF.)* You just met this man last night?

ALTHEA. Yes.

INA. I don't understand.

ALTHEA. Leif and I decided that we would work this puzzle together.

*(Indicating MATTIE and CONNIE.)*

Later we got reinforcements.

INA. I understand *that*. What I *don't* understand -

begged out of my lunch date and came here early. I thought you could use the help.

ALTHEA. I appreciate your coming early. Yes, there are a few little things –

MATTIE. Althea, are we going to stop working the puzzle?

INA. (*Answering for ALTHEA.*) Yes, you're all going to stop working this puzzle.

MATTIE. (*Remonstrating.*) We worked on it all night.

INA. It's a very large puzzle. How did you ever think you could finish it?

LEIF. We think outside the box, lady. We take the puzzle out of the box and stay outside the box.

END

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CONNIE. Leif, honey, shut up.

LEIF. I always make every effort to complete what I start.

CONNIE. Leif, please.

LEIF. (*To CONNIE.*) Do you want the house?

CONNIE. The house.

LEIF. Yes. Do you like the house? Should we buy the house?

CONNIE. I'm – Yes. I do, Leif. I do like it.

LEIF. Good.

*(An official announcement.)*

We're buying the house.

INA. What?

ALTHEA. (*To LEIF.*) You don't want to think it through, dear? None of us is thinking very clearly right now.

LEIF. I love the house. Connie loves the house. Especially the bay window. *And* this basement rec room. I don't mind the lack of sun. You make your own sun in a room like this. We're buying the house. *And this ping*