

The Jigsaw Puzzle

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FADE IN

EXT. NURSING HOME - DAY

A 40-year-old man of ordinary appearance enters the front door of the SYLVAN RETIREMENT COMMUNITY.

His name is ANDREW FOSTER. He wears a suit and tie that look a bit ruffled, a bit out-of-style.

He carries a shopping bag.

Through the glass of the front door, we see Andrew approach the Female Receptionist at the front desk. She smiles in recognition, points to the shopping bag.

He holds it up, says something to the Receptionist who nods in approval.

Andrew turns, walks out of view.

INT. RECREATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Andrew enters a large room. Many of Sylvan's elderly residents have gathered here to play cards, read, watch TV, etc.

Andrew crosses the room toward an alcove where a frail old woman sits by herself at a large table, thumbing through a magazine.

ANDREW

Hi, Mom. Sorry to be late.

Andrew puts his shopping bag on the table, gives MOTHER a hug. She's not responsive.

MOTHER

Thought you'd forgotten me.

ANDREW

Looks like they've got a canasta game going back there. You like to play canasta, don't you?

MOTHER

I won't play with them. They cheat. What's in the sack?

ANDREW

Something you might like.

Andrew pulls from the bag a box containing a 2000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Mother's eyes show a flicker of interest.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Remember when we used to put and
extra leaf in the table so-

MOTHER
(taking the box)
Barbara and Logan were really good
at working these.

ANDREW
I helped.

MOTHER
You were too young. Hope it
doesn't have a lot of sky.

ANDREW
Not a bit of it.

MOTHER
Don't like to work sky. Well, sit
down and let's get started.

Mother takes the lid off the box. Andrew looks at his watch.

ANDREW
I'd like to but there's some work I
to do before--

MOTHER
Oh, that can wait. C'mon, sit
down.

Andrew sighs, sits down, helps his Mother pour the jigsaw
pieces onto the table. They spend a few moments sorting
through them.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
The fun part comes when you put in
the last few pieces, but first, you
have to do a lot of hard work.

INT. RECREATION ROOM - A WEEK LATER

As Andrew enters the room, he's greeted by SARAH RIDGEWAY.

Dr. Ridgeway is Sylvan's imposing but not intimidating
director.

DR. RIDGEWAY

Ah, Mr. Foster. Your mother has certainly taken to that jigsaw puzzle you brought her.

Dr. Ridgeway nods toward the alcove where Andrew's mother sits bent over the table, all by herself, working on the puzzle.

ANDREW

Well, you said you hadn't had much luck getting her to join in the other activities, so I thought ...

Dr. Ridgeway gives Andrew's shoulder an affectionate pat.

DR. RIDGEWAY

She's lucky to have you.

Dr. Ridgeway walks off. Andrew crosses to the alcove. Mother barely glances up from the puzzle which is now half-finished.

MOTHER

You're late again.

ANDREW

Sorry.

Andrew pulls up a chair, picks through the puzzle's loose pieces.

MOTHER

Suppose you'll be leaving early, too.

ANDREW

I took a second job, you know.

MOTHER

Why do you need a second job?

ANDREW

This place costs money.

MOTHER

So, just ask Barbara and Logan to chip in a bit more.

ANDREW

(almost to himself)
Yeah, why didn't I think of that.

INT. RECREATION ROOM - A WEEK LATER

Andrew enters, looking concerned. Dr. Ridgeway steps up to him.

ANDREW

How is she?

Dr. Ridgeway glances toward the alcove where Mother sits hunched over the table, working very slowly.

DR. RIDGEWAY

That last episode was a severe one, and she's not responding well to treatment. But she still manages to get up and work on that puzzle. It's as if she's determined to finish it before ...

Dr. Ridgeway pauses, reluctant to finish the thought. Andrew nods and crosses to the alcove. He sees the puzzle is now 90% finished. He also sees his Mother has aged and weakened.

ANDREW

Hi, Mom.

MOTHER

Logan?

ANDREW

Logan's in Arizona. With his wife and kids. I'm Andrew.

MOTHER

Oh.

Mother keeps laboriously trying to fit in pieces. Andrew regards her with sad, resigned eyes.

INT. RECREATION ROOM - A WEEK LATER

Andrew walks through the room, accompanied by Dr. Ridgeway. They pass an easel on which sits a large photo of Andrew's mother. Beneath the picture has been printed: IN MEMORIAM.

DR. RIDGEWAY

We've left it just the way it was, thinking that, perhaps, you might like to have it.

By now they've reached the alcove where the puzzle has been completed except for six loose pieces.

ANDREW

I thought you said she'd finished it.

DR. RIDGEWAY

She did. Late that evening. But then Mary heard her moving around in the night. She must have come out here and removed those pieces.

ANDREW

Why would she do that?

Dr. Ridgeway shrugs, then turns when her name is called by an elderly resident.

DR. RIDGEWAY

Excuse me.

Dr. Ridgeway walks off. Andrew stares at the puzzle.

He sits down and stares at it some more.

Finally he picks up the pieces, one by one, and puts them into place.

When he's finished, he runs one hand over the completed puzzle.

Then he sits back in the chair. After a pause, the hint of a smile appears on his face.

FADE OUT.