

## Jigsaw Puzzle: A Better Piece

*As the curtains open, the audience is met with the cream-colored walls of a living room and a dark grey couch facing the audience, center stage. On the couch, sprawled out in an attempt to take up as much space as possible, lies TATE, a boy in his late teens. His face's place against one of the couch's pillows conceals his expression. He lets out a muffled groan before flipping onto his back and spreading his arms out once again.*

TATE (*looking at the ceiling, frustrated*): What am I going to do?

*NATHAN, who has been observing his friend from his stool at the kitchen counter, upstage left, simply shakes his head, sighing. He is working on a school assignment on his laptop before he decides to close it and stand up to address his troubled friend. After making his way towards TATE in quiet strides, walks to center stage to the couch and places his hands on the couch backrest.*

NATHAN (*sternly*): Alright, I think you've spent enough time sulking. I'll ask you, what happened at work today?

*TATE rolls to his side so that he is facing the audience, back towards NATHAN.*

TATE (*melodramatically*): Leave me alone. Just let me wallow in self-pity.

*Picking up one of the pillows beside TATE, NATHAN somewhat forcefully smacks TATE in the side with it. A yelp escapes TATE's mouth.*

NATHAN (*deadpan*): I can't help you if you're not telling me what's wrong.

*NATHAN circles the couch, to face TATE and nudges his knee with his hand.*

NATHAN: Move over loser.

*TATE somewhat reluctantly sits up and brings the pillow he had been hit with closer to his chest. His shoulders slump as he averts his gaze towards the wall. With softened eyes, NATHAN sits himself beside his friend.*

NATHAN: Speak.

TATE (*quietly*): I got fired..

*He turns his body to face TATE in a display of complete attention. NATHAN places his hand delicately on TATE'S knee.*

NATHAN (*softly*): What happened?

TATE (*visibly irritated*): I would mess up orders, and the customers would get extremely upset. I thought it was because I was new at the job, and I'd eventually get better but... I didn't. The manager couldn't bear with the complaints anymore, and decided to just let me go.

*TATE looks down at his hands that are folded on his lap.*

TATE (*weakly*): Can you blame me for messing up though? I just can't concentrate when I'm doing something that doesn't interest me... I just can't.

NATHAN (*smiles sympathetically*): Still... You really needed that job...

TATE: I know... I just don't know what to do now...

NATHAN (*tilting his head*): Why not just find a job where you do something you're truly interested in?

TATE (*laughs bitterly, shakes his head and looks at Nathan*): Those exist?

NATHAN (*sighs tiredly*): Don't be like that, you have lots of interests. I'm sure you can find at least one job that you'd like. Why not something like (*beat*) pet-sitting? You love animals.

TATE (*unsure*): Most of the people in this city prefer cats, and I don't exactly feel comfortable taking care of anything that's not a dog.

NATHAN: Fair point.

NATHAN (*pauses, pondering for a second*): How about taking care of children then? I remember you mentioning how you used to take care of your younger cousins when their parents were working. Didn't you also look after that one neighbor's baby for like two years? You could work as a babysitter!

TATE (*squeezing the pillow more tightly*): I don't know, are you sure I could find a job like that?

NATHAN (*chuckles quietly*): Are you seriously going to ask me that in a city full of rich people?

*NATHAN stands up with determination for friend, he begins to pace as he reassures TATE.*

The majority already has people taking care of their kids, and with you being a college student who's a lot cheaper than the average caretaker, they'll most likely want you instead. Plus, if they're doubtful, you can say you have actual experience. With the money you get, you'll be able to send some to your family.

*NATHAN stops pacing and faces TATE.*

NATHAN: You could even take care of your student loans.

TATE (*hesitant*): Do you think I could do it though? Being a babysitter takes a lot of work and I'd have to study at the same time..won't I get really stressed out? What if I end up messing this up too?

NATHAN (*smiles reassuringly*): It's going to be hard, but still, I'm sure you can do it. Have a little more faith in yourself, if you keep thinking you'll mess up, then you will. And who knows, maybe you'll be able to study while taking care of the kids?

*TATE watches as NATHAN stands up and makes his way towards the counter where his closed laptop rests. NATHAN picks it up with a single hand and heads back to the couch.*

NATHAN: But if you're so worried about not having enough time for schoolwork, I'm always here to help. I can give you some of my study sheets when we have tests and even remind you about upcoming assignments.

TATE (*with more self-assurance*): Are you sure you want to do this? We need to be completely sure.

NATHAN (*snorts, amused*): I wouldn't have offered if I wasn't sure.

*NATHAN plops down on the couch and turns on the laptop, looking at TATE as the screen lights up.*

NATHAN (*raises eyebrow*): So what do you say?

TATE (*nodding confidently*): Let's get that job.

**BLACKOUT**