

PIECE BY PIECE

By 5-22

CHARACTERS

Matt: 30-ish man, dressed in sweatpants and hoodie that says Las Vegas
Lena: 30-ish woman, dressed in active wear pants and over-sized cardigan

SETTING

A dining room table with two seats across from each other with a cell phone propped at the end.
Two boxes are sitting on the floor.

ACT I

MATT and LENA are sitting at the dining table across from each other.

MATT reaches over to the phone and presses a button.

LENA

Squinting at the phone

Is it on?

MATT

And we are live! Welcome everyone to our Quarantine Puzzle Marathon.

LENA

Yay (*deadpan, quiet tone*).

MATT

We will be working non-stop until we finish two puzzles. Some of you may be wondering why we would embark on such a crazy-ass endeavour.

LENA

And why we would broadcast it live on social media. (*Shrugs*)

MATT

Because if this quarantine has shown us one thing, it's that we can't focus and finish anything. So I've come up with a task with a definitive end point. And social media will keep us honest. Viewers, you don't have to watch the entire thing. Just check in every now and then. Coach us on puzzle technique. Start your own puzzle. Let's go head-to-head.

Lena, how many viewers we got so far?

LENA

Grabs the tablet lying on the table beside her

We got four! (*Looks surprised*)

MATT

Ok (*looks disappointed*). Do our viewers have any comments or questions?

LENA

Pauses until she hears a Ding!

Oh here we go. Stanley Paul wants to know how many pieces are in each puzzle.

MATT

Important detail, thanks for asking. Both puzzles are 1,000 pieces each.

LENA

*Mouths the words “F*** me”*

MATT

Any other comments out there?

LENA

Stanley also says, Ha! Good luck finishing one of them in the next two days.

MATT

Looks directly into the phone

Challenge accepted.

(Turns to LENA)

See, this is why we had to get up early. It will probably take the entire day and most of the night.

LENA

I don't know Matt, Stanley seems like he knows about puzzles. Are we being too ambitious? Should we just try one for the next six hours and see how it goes?

MATT

Don't worry about it. I'm organized and you're amazing at all those word puzzles. You fly right through them!

LENA

That's right. I finally have a real world application for my epic Word Search skills.

MATT

You're also pretty good at those Word Jumbles in the paper. My mom said so.

DING!

LENA

Stanley has another comment! He writes, “Jigsaw puzzles have no practical purpose. Your epic visual skills are being wasted on something useless. You should come over and find my missing USB drive.” Who is this guy?

MATT

Shrugs

Alright, time’s a wastin’. Let’s get started. I am opening the first box.

Reaches down to retrieve the top box, then opens it and pours the pieces on the table.

So the first step in successful puzzle building is to find all the outer edge pieces to create the framework.

MATT slowly pushes pieces around, pulling out the occasional piece.

LENA is quickly moving pieces into different piles.

MATT

What are you doing?

LENA

I’m sorting pieces by colour scheme.

MATT

What about the edge pieces?

LENA

I’ll throw them your way when I see them. Hey, you got your plan, I got mine.

DING!

LENA

So Liz M would like to know what the completed puzzle will look like. *(Slaps her forehead with the palm of her hand)* Genius! We should have been studying the photo before we even started.

Grabs the lid and looks at the photo.

It’s a pretty lake with a pretty mountain!

Turns the lid toward the phone

Holy crap there’s a lot of blue here – the sky, the lake, even the mountain is kinda blue.

MATT

But there's some green grass. And there's a shadow on the mountain. That's useful.

LENA

This looks impossible.

She continues to examine the box.

Oh here's something important for our viewers: it's a picture of Diamond Lake, New Zealand!

MATT

But not all that useful for us.

LENA flips to box over and raises her eyebrows.

LENA

Well, if you want something useful, here's something: Missing three pieces. (*Points to the words on the bottom of the box*)

MATT

What?

LENA

Where did you get this puzzle?

MATT

I told you, from one of our neighbours.

MATT looks cagey. LENA narrows her eyes.

MATT

It was left on the shelf. In the parking garage.

LENA

Oh, you mean the shelf where everyone leaves shit they don't want but can't be bothered to dispose of properly? The same shelf which I banned you from taking any more useless stuff?

MATT

The boxes looked new. And it's not all junk. Remember the butter dish? We still use that. Think of them as just pre-shared experiences worthy of another experience.

LENA

Oh, like that nice-looking urn you brought up. Remember? And when I finally opened it four months later, we found ashes inside. Ashes! We got a whole lifetime of someone else's pre-used experiences! And then when I returned it to the shelf with a very heartfelt note no one would take it back. I'm pretty sure the urn came from that old lady's apartment, the one who got shipped to the home. Her nephew just got rid of all of her stuff, he didn't care.

MATT

But I got the urn for you! I thought you'd like it for Halloween. You love decorating!

LENA

We have a dead person in the hallway closet. And it probably came with a ghost. You can never find your keys since it's been there! (*points a finger at him*)

MATT

It could just be cigarette ashes. If it upsets you so much, why don't you just get rid of it? Donate it or throw it in the garbage?

LENA

I can't believe you just suggested something that could cause even more trouble. Seriously, you know NOTHING of the paranormal. Do you even read my Facebook posts?

MATT

(*pause*). I like all of your posts.

DING, DING, DING

LENA

Why don't we see what our audience has to say? This should be fun! The first comment is from your mother. Hi Helen! (*Waves to the camera*). And she writes, "Oh for heaven's sake Matt." I know, right? And Heather says we can order brand new puzzles online.

MATT looks completely offended by the idea.

LENA

Turns to look into the camera

Heather, have you met my boyfriend, the accountant?

Turns back to the tablet.

Also, Stanley Paul, our most prolific contributor, writes that, "At this rate, it should take you 36 hours to finish one puzzle that's only 997 pieces."

MATT grabs the tablet and starts scrolling.

MATT

Ah, finally, we have a useful comment from Liz M. Don't you have another puzzle you can do? Thank you Liz, we certainly do have another.

MATT picks up the other box on the floor. Holds it up to the camera and then shows it to LENA.

MATT

It's got all these pretty boats, in a bunch of different colours for easy sorting. And best of all, there's nothing written on the bottom of the box. So no missing pieces!

LENA

But you can't trust that. It came from the Shelf of Lies!

MATT

Hey, we now have 7 views. Let's put it to a vote. Audience, do we start with the Boats (*picks up the box cover*) or the Lake? (*picks up the other box cover*)

LENA

You can also vote for Neither.

LENA takes the tablet back and waits for comments to appear.
DING, DING, DING

LENA

Boats. Neither. Lake. Another for Lake. For real people? Neither. Boats.

MATT

So far that's a tie. We need a tiebreaker. Come on, one more vote!

DING

LENA

Not a vote, but a comment, from Sienna. (*Turns to the camera*). That's Matt's ex-girlfriend. "Hi Matt! Is that the hoodie I bought you in Vegas?"

MATT looks down at this hoodie. His face is aghast.

LENA

Is she referring to that Las Vegas trip you took with your “buddies” (*makes air quotes*) right when we first started dating, after you and Sienna supposedly broke up?

MATT

I think that was a different trip.

LENA

Really? I thought you’d only been there the one time? You don’t really care for Vegas, remember? So you plan on never returning.

DING

LENA

We have another comment. It’s your mother with another comment. “Oh for heaven’s sake Matt.”

MATT

My own mother.

LENA

You know, I think you were wrong about Sienna.

MATT

How’s that?

LENA

She’s not completely useless.

DING!

Lena reads the tablet, and then slumps her shoulders.

MATT

Who’s that?

LENA

Sienna.

MATT

What'd she write?

LENA

Lake.

MATT

Diamond Lake puzzle wins! (*Raises his arms in victory*)

ACT II

Matt and Lena are once again sitting at the dining table. A partially completed puzzle is on the table as well as four beer bottles. Matt is wearing a different hoodie.

LENA is holding up a magnifying glass to the puzzle.

LENA

I don't know why they call it Diamond Lake, it's not even in the shape of a diamond. It looks like a bell.

MATT

Maybe they found diamonds in it.

LENA

Wouldn't that be amazing, just finding a diamond one day. Like it's your birthday, and you wake up to find this box on your pillow, and it has a diamond in it!

MATT

Hm.

LENA

Or an emerald would be even more amazing. Sapphires are nice too.

LENA steels a glance at an impassive MATT and rolls her eyes. She puts down the magnifying glass and tries to put a piece into an empty spot in the puzzle.

LENA

Oh, you mother-fucker, why don't you fit! You look like you should fit. Why do you have to be just a little bit off? Fuck you.

DING!

LENA

Oh look, Stanley Paul has returned to commentating. He writes, "I can't believe you're still doing this. Thought the whole Vegas affair would have ended everything!" Well Stanley, where have you been for the last four hours? You see it all got quickly resolved when my former *friend* and co-worker revealed that when Matt and I were on a brief break, I slept with my boss!

MATT

It's not really resolved (*under his breath*).

LENA

I haven't worked there for years and I haven't seen him since I left.

MATT

But you worked there for a year after your little fling.

LENA

Not even a year. And it never happened again because we got back together. So really, why are we holding grudges?

MATT

Crosses his arms in front of his chest.

I guess if you've forgiven me about Sienna...?

LENA

Thing is, I'm not all that impressed with the reason you gave me for still going on that trip. Because the tickets and car rental were non-refundable? Like I can totally see you contemplating that side of it but it's still a bad reason.

She takes a long swig of beer.

However, if I'm being honest, I think I knew about you and Sienna in Las Vegas. I ran into one of your friends shortly after and asked him how he liked Vegas. Guess he forgot he was one of your alibis or you forgot to tell him he was because he had no idea what I was talking about.

MATT

But you never said anything to me.

LENA

I don't know, guess I was waiting for you to tell me. And then shortly after, my dad died. You were so good to me during that really rough time, I kind of forgave it. Or maybe I didn't really. Because the moment we decided to take a break...

MATT

A 72-hour break. I can't believe you slept with Bob. He's so, obnoxious. He's got the personality of a used car salesman.

LENA

Well, he is Director of Sales. Regardless, it wasn't planned. It was convenient. And we never spoke of it again. He even stopped being totally obnoxious around me. He must have been shitting his pants I would tell anyone. Every time I came out of the HR department, he'd look panic stricken. So obviously I would go to the HR department all the time for no good reason.

MATT

And you did this for how long?

LENA

Until he had the heart attack. Anyway, all this stuff happened over five years ago. We weren't all that committed back then. I think you and I have come a long way.

MATT

True. We have a mortgage together now.

LENA

There's my accountant!

She throws a puzzle piece back into a pile.

I think that bit of sky has to be one of the missing pieces. There are no more sky blue pieces that fit. I've tried all of them. It's big, gaping hole in an otherwise beautiful sky. It's so distracting.

MATT

Well, we can make a piece. From the box.

LENA

Will that even look right? Can we make it a perfect fit?

MATT

We can come close to a perfect fit. But it will look even better because we can draw anything we want in that piece. Like a bird!

LENA

Or a UFO.

MATT

Alright. Also, if there is a missing piece in the lake you can put a shark in it.

LENA

No. It has to be a lake monster. A small loch ness head would be subtly convincing. And we can put Bigfoot in the mountain. Hiding behind a tree.

MATT

There's my team player!

He scans the table.

Hey, did you put these three pieces together?

LENA

No, they came out of the box that way.

MATT

Well, we can't leave them together.

LENA

Why not?

MATT

Because that's cheating!

LENA

Are you calling me a cheater?

MATT

No. I am not. I'm really not.

LENA

Smiles

Fine, separate them if you need to. *(yawns)* I'm hungry.

MATT

What do you feel like?

LENA

Pasta. With bacon and asparagus! Maybe even in a cream sauce.

MATT

So glad we're eating carbs and dairy again. My belly has never been happier.

LENA

But I'd have to stop working on the puzzle for at least an hour.

MATT

That's fine.

LENA

Really? What about the marathon? What about our live feed?

MATT

We'll just turn it off. Resume later.

LENA

We can do that? But we're up to 14 viewers! And 217 likes.

MATT

Turns to face the screen.

Alright folks. We're taking a two-hour break for lunch. I recommend you all do the same. Call your mom too. Let her know you're not about to get divorced.

MATT presses a button on his phone.

LENA

You know it never occurred to me we could just do that. Shut off our live feed. I thought we were committed to the bitter end.

MATT

It has occurred to me that a puzzle marathon is kind of pointless. There's no prize, we don't get a medal. And my neck hurts. I need a break.

LENA

But are we gonna finish the puzzles? Or are we just giving up?

MATT

Of course we'll finish. I am committed to that. But we got time. We're not going anywhere. We can't!

LENA

I'm gonna bake some cookies later.

MATT

The chocolate ones, with pecans?

LENA

Double chocolate baby!

Crashing sound coming from offstage.

MATT turns around in his seat to look behind him. LENA doesn't react.

MATT

Where did that come from?

LENA

The hallway closet.

MATT

Well, isn't that a weird coincidence. Considering we were talking earlier about the urn.

LENA

Happens all the time actually. Is this the first time you've noticed?

MATT

You're just messing with me.

LENA

I'm not! It happens mostly in the middle of the night. But since you're a heavy sleeper...

MATT

It's been over a year. Lots of new people have moved into the building. Maybe we should try putting it back on the shelf?

LENA

Well, I have put word out in my paranormal groups if anyone wants to take it on. I've had some interest but nothing definite. I think we're committed for now.

MATT

I don't believe in that stuff anyway. Since we are taking a break, I'm gonna bring the garbage and recycling down to the basement.

LENA

Sounds good. I'll rinse out these bottles.

MATT walks offstage. LENA stands up and collects the empty beer bottles

MATT

Shouting from offstage

Lena, where the hell are my keys?!