

PUZZLE CLUB
by Dave Biscella

Josslyn Bennard approached the church on fifth street for the first time ever. She's lived down the road from it her entire life, but has never had any interest in entering it. She was never very religious, and never dated a local boy who was, so she didn't really have any use for church. She approached hesitantly, entering the front door and heading down the steps into the basement, just like she had been instructed to in the email. Down the steps to the right, and there it was, a poster board sign on standing on an easel that read "Puzzle Club: Tonight." She smiled and headed towards the door, knowing she was in the right place.

Josslyn was just over 19 years old, and had just dropped out of college near the end of her Freshman year. She was happy with the decision, but knew her parents wouldn't be. She hadn't told them yet, which was proving more and more difficult considering she still lived with them. She had also cheated on her boyfriend since sophomore year of high school over the weekend, not because she's a terrible person, but because she didn't love him anymore but didn't want to hurt him by telling him that. There was a lot running through Josslyn's mind at all times nowadays. She could either bathe in the oncoming depression that seemed inevitable, or she could find a distraction.

She entered the doorway, looking around at tables and tables filled with dozens of women all focused on the puzzles in front of them. They all seemed so focused and content. Upon Josslyn's entering the room, Meredith Happs smiled and rushed over to her. Meredith's high school boyfriend killed himself a week after high school graduation. She was broken for nearly a decade before meeting her husband, Alvin. They were married for 36 joy-filled years,

until two summers ago when Alvin committed suicide for reasons that still remain unclear. At this point, Meredith was broken again. Clearly, she was flawed.

Meredith handed Josslyn a box, it was a 750 piece puzzle with a picture of three dolphins jumping out of the water in unison. Taped to the box was a note that read "Do this one upside down". Josslyn took the box and smiled. Meredith smiled back and handed her one more note.

"Welcome to Puzzle Talking. Challenge yourself. No talking until you solve it."

Josslyn read it to herself and nodded her head to Meredith, showing she understands completely. Meredith pointed to the last table in the back of the room and sat back down to work on two 2500 piece puzzles whose pieces were all laid in one single pile. One, a picture of a sunset, the other of an Apple Orchard.

Josslyn worked her way towards the back of the room, passing by Helen Alberoth. Helen was working on a 5000 piece puzzle that was a solid black image. Helen's son Devin had recently come out of the closet. Helen still loved him dearly, but for reasons unbeknownst to her, did not challenge when her husband Donald kicked Devin out of the house. She hasn't spoken to her son since. Each night, she lies awake wishing Devin would show up on the front porch and forgive her, all while lying next to her husband that she has nothing but contempt for that she keeps hidden as deep down as possible. On the surface, their marriage is perfect.

Sitting at the last table, with a spot open next to her was Heather Halbern, working on 750 piece portrait of a bald eagle. Heather was in her early 30's, mother of three girls, ages 6, 8, and 11. Heather's husband was a lawyer, which allowed her to stay at home and be a full time mom. She truly loved her life. She adored her husband and their daughters and was very thankful for how perfect her life was. But, she was also addicted to porn and self pleasure, and every morning while hubby was at work and the girls were in school, she would spend her time

in adult chat rooms, oftentimes ending up on camera for a mutual masturbation session with a complete stranger. She was always showered and ready for the day by noon.

Josslyn reached the final table and sat down next to Heather. Across from her was Sandy Ne. Sandy's 2000 piece puzzle of a school bus was fully assembled in front of her. She stared at it with a loving grin. Sandy was in love with her sister's husband, and has been since the day they met. She's never told anybody, especially not her girlfriend of a decade, Debbie.

Josslyn sat down and dumped out her puzzle, taking the time to turn each piece face down. She laid one single piece in the center of the open table space in front of her. She stared at it, looking at it, looking to the pile of pieces that were created to surround it. Her shoulders dropped, she took a deep breath. For the first time in months, she felt relieved.

It finally made sense.

"I've solved it," Josslyn proclaims, standing up proudly from her table. The entire room turned to face her, waiting for an answer they've all needed to hear their whole life. "Nothing matters," Josslyn said with a huge grin, the relief she's feeling for the first time in so long escaping through her smile and her eyes that were now seeing more clearly than ever. "None of this..." She paused, looking around the room. Dozens of faces smiling back at her, the same feeling of relief appearing in their eyes. Their eyes focused on her, not their puzzles. Every one of them soaking in every word, every one of them ready for the answer. "...matters."