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Jacqueline Bull

The Day After I Got My Tumor Out

The day after I got my tumor out I was sitting putting together a jigsaw puzzle that my dad gave me. I was putting it together with one hand because they took the thing off of my chest on the left side and it hurt to move it. They didn't give me a cast or anything. I just let the arm hug my stomach and let my dominant hand do the work.

The puzzle was of a really nice landscape with a purple and pink sky. Landscape puzzles look really nice after they're done. The puzzles that look like they were meant to be puzzles usually suck. When you're done they don't look like anything, just a puzzle. Puzzles that are pictures of something should look like that thing when they are done. Landscapes are pretty, but they often have a blank blue sky that is hell to assemble. The damn thing is just one color so you have to try every piece that has the right number of nubs and holes to fit.

Anyway, I'm starting the puzzle. I start with finding the edges and making the border. I have the puzzle set up on the coffee table in front of the T.V. It's not really big enough, but I can have the T.V. in the background.

After I get the border done, my incision point is starting to hurt again. I got up and changed my ice pack, fiddling with the loud drawer of the freezer. The cold ice pack feels weird near my boob and it's awkward to try to get the ice pack to lay flat near my collarbone. It mostly just makes my whole chest cold. I was worried that if I stopped with the ice then it would really start to hurt, they cut me open after all.

I sat back down and held the ice pack to my body with my cold left hand and get back to work. What usually happens is that I work from the edges inward and have some floating piece in the middle like an island. Then I'll try the same six pieces to try to connect the island to the edge and it won't work. Then I will send those pieces away, banish them behind the box so they won't trick me into picking them up anymore. Then I will move on to another spot, get in quite a few pieces and feel familiar with all the different pieces. I'll remember the one with a weird skinny nub and an over-rounded edge.

I'll go back to the island and then finally I will make a little bridge to

the island. This is the point other people like to jump in because the immediate next step is easy. There is a defined space, so it is easy to tell what size pieces can fit. The obvious space will get filled in and everyone will go back to watching the T.V.

But actually when I get to the “returning to the island and un-banishing the pieces” phase, my dad shows up. He got off work early and came to see me after my surgery. He asks me all the usual surgery questions about the pain, numbness, medication, etc. He even brought me flowers which was really nice. He seemed nervous for me, but didn’t look at me like I was fragile. After all, it’s only skin cancer.

We are both too awkward to talk much, so I invite him to join me and the puzzle. He sits down next to me and puts on his glasses. He starts to click his teeth and suck on his gum, but I don’t mind.

I’ve lost track of what show is on, but it’s nice to have the little noise fill the living room. Now my ice pack is warm, but I let the pain creep back in on me; I’m more focused on the puzzle anyhow.

My dad moves some of my piles from within the border of the puzzle to the outside. He can see it better that way. He’s not as good as putting the puzzles together as I am, but I like that he’s there.

I don’t know if I’m going to die. I mean, I know I will die, eventually everyone dies. I don’t know yet if what they removed is going to kill me later.

My dad tells me about this puzzle that is all gimmicky and comes with extra pieces. That’s just cruel.