

## Neutral Milk Hotel

### "Conversation With W. Cullen Hart"

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But we fucked up that Remedial English class, because  
we were smoking pot  
We're not in college.  
Right.  
We can't move on to college, can we?

So, like-  
We are not in college, are we?  
So, how do you move on to another place to shop if you  
haven't taken that Remedial English class and you've  
got these pieces of a puzzle that won't fit together and  
your parents are, like, eating blood wafers?  
Grow sideburns.  
Sideburns. They really help, really?  
Yeah.  
They give you that distinctive look.  
They do.  
Like standing out of the crowd.  
They really do, they really do, and I...that's why I don't  
think I fit in.  
Because you don't have any sideburns?  
I can't grow 'em, I just...they just don't look right, I  
always cut them off.  
[Long pause]  
That's terrible...  
See, the problem is: you can't find the puzzle with they  
guy watching 'Price is Right'...  
I want-  
You need blood wafers.  
No, I want the puzzle with--  
See, they have ones...they have the one with your  
family, you just haven't been to the right place. You  
haven't seen the ones...makes it easier to put together  
when it's your family member's face right there in front  
of you in puzzle pieces. It's just that you don't know the  
fat man. but when it's your family, you'll realize..what  
it's all about.  
No, but see, I bought the...the puzzle with the rat on the  
treadmill on the farm, and the...the decapitated goats.  
That's the problem, you have to get the ones with the  
wafers. And the bloody trousers. And your family.

But I've already got all these puzzle pieces stuck together that are, like, a part of me now, they're like, I mean, you can't sep- Once you become a part of the puzzle piece, you can't really separate yourself from it anymore.

So that makes you an artist.

I know! but I've gotta get some more puzzle pieces.

You're an artist! Make your own pieces! Use wafer. Use pieces of wafer. Use Thumbtacks.

But what am I going to do with all these weird puzzle pieces that weren't even supposed to be part of me in the first place? I mean, I tried to keep my eyes open, I tried, like, I tried to be very aware of what puzzle I was buying, and when I opened the box, I tried to be really aware of, like, the pieces, and making sure the pieces were what was on the box.

Can I-

But then I shoved the pieces together, and, it was too late! It was like all these, like, disjointed body figures and stuff, and I tried to convince myself that it was a flower, but it was not a flower, man. It was not a flower, and-

You know why, right? I am telling you I know the answer, and it's this:

[Long pause]

Do you remember when you were talking about putting the thumb- the pushpin in...

Yes. In the blood.

Right.

Doesn't it all make sense now?

No!

Did you...did you find...the sideburns...in, in the puzzle?

No!

They're in the bottom! They're taped to the bottom.

I've got these-

Can I use them, can I please staple them on? That is the key.

You can do what ever you want.

[tacking noise]

Ulp

What you don't understand, is it-

[tacking noise]

Ow

What you don't understand, is I thought it was a flower.

But it wasn't. Ok? It was part of the rat on the treadmill.

It was this dude's legs watching 'The Price is Right,' Ok?

It was a part of the blender. And I...I convinced myself for so long that it was a flower. I mean, I spent years

and years and years convincing myself that these puzzle pieces added up to a flower, and it wasn't at all.

And once I woke up, I realized: 'How do I trust other

pieces? How do I take new pieces and put them together with this much, you know, vigor that I once did, because, what if they're not a flower either? What if they are just like-

They've gotta be animal pieces. They might be animal pieces. Pieces of goats...

That's what I was trying for. That was, like, a rat and a goat and the whole thing and the goats didn't have any hands.

And you bought this at Wal-mart?

And that's what I wanted, that's all I wanted. Since I was a kid. Since I was a kid! And it was just- I was just- And you've never gotten a puzzle together?

No.

Never?

Never. There are all these disjointed parts I convinced myself to be flowers.

You have a serious problem, young man.

I know I do. But I don't think I'm much different from anybody else...I bet everybody else has got a bunch of, like, pseudo-flowers in their pockets that really are just, like, pieces of this weird puzzle that aren't supposed to fit together.

Nope.

I mean, I hope I'm not alone in this thing, you know.

You are.

well, it sure feels that way, I mean when I go through the news stands and stuff and read the magazines, and everybody seems to have their flowers so perfectly put together, You know? Because, see, what they can do is then they can take you in a studio and they can take your photograph, and make it look like you got your pieces puzzled together really well, you know? And they can, they can do anything these days. The, the way you pack it...

They've got computers...they've got their shit together. Right, they can make it look like you got your flower together, but they really don't. But it makes the people who don't got their flower together feel really small and insignificant.

You are. But that's what makes all the difference, you're an artist.

But I'm not insignificant, because my flower isn't any more pressed together than anybody else's flower. I mean, and if, I guess if I had a record company or something that could take my photo and make it look like I had my flower together and I'd be OK, but I'm not, I don't want to do that because then all these people with no flowers pressed together will coming to me, like, treating me like I was somebody who had my flower put together, and I don't and it'd be a big lie.

And then I'd be doing Swanson TV dinner ads when I was fifteen and be real smug and commit suicide on the Brooklyn Bridge. There wouldn't be much of a point in that, would it?

No. You're an artist, I told you a hundred times. You see, what you...the part that you don't understand...What is there to not understand? Ahh...I-I...it's so hard for me to explain it to you, because... see, I see you're a bit off, actually.

Very off. I didn't realize how off I was until I pulled my pieces of puzzle out of my pocket, and saw it for what it really was.

Did you try tape?

It was stuck together...it's- I wish I could pull 'em apart. If I could pull 'em apart I'd be OK, but I can't, they're stuck together.

I see.

Well, I came home, showed it to my folks really proud of my flower...and that's when I realized:

You should be in college.

I should be in college, yep.

I should be tak-

[buzz]

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