

The missing piece

By Elena Arévalo Melville

Edie does the jigsaw all wrong, which is why I don't let her help. Helping, for Edie, is forcing the pieces in the wrong place, with fingers still sticky with jam.

Grandad says, 'Joseph, share!'

I let Edie help but I save my favourite piece of the jigsaw, the one with the nest, for last. It's in my pocket, safe from jam. Mum would have told Edie to wash her hands.

We pause the puzzle to go to the shops. Down the hill we go.

Mum and Dad will be here on Saturday. Just two days to go. We don't really see Mum's parents as they are in another part of the world, not just in different parts of the country as Daddy's are.

Not everyone has a mum and dad together, nearby or there at all.

Grandad is our nearest grandparent. He's really cool, really good at making things with wood and making dinner that we want to eat, but not great at telling Edie that jigsaws and jammy fingers don't go together.

I'm also good at some things but not others. I can understand shapes and patterns. I am the puzzle solver, but I cannot make dinner and I'm not great at telling when it's my turn to say something. I don't know how to do some things Grandad does but even Grandad doesn't know how to do everything, and he is ancient!

'Haven't you had enough time to practise?' I ask him

'Too many things to know,' he says. 'You can't know them all.'

Where you been, Maurice?’ shouts Grandad’s friend, Mick. We’ve been to the shop to get carrots and peas, but Grandad replies to his friend, smiling, ‘There and back, just to see how far it is!’

Turns out the way back is way longer for Grandad because it’s uphill. So, I help him with the bag and Edie holds his hand. “There,” she says, and Grandad smiles even more.

I didn’t know Grandad is also Maurice.

People are a bit like jigsaws: You work them out from the outside in, but unlike jigsaws, you can never really finish them: they always surprise you with pieces you didn’t expect.

You can never see the full picture of others and others cannot know the full picture of you. We make do with our best guesses.

And right now, I’m guessing that Grandad is happy that we are here, and that the hill is over and that we are back in his house. I’m glad we have two more days with Grandad.

On the table lies the jigsaw, all done minus one piece. I don’t have to be the one that always solves the puzzles.

‘Here, you can solve this one,’ I say to Edie, and I hand her the next piece. ‘Can you find its place?’

“I can try...” she says, wiping her hand on her jumper and, ever so gently, she moves it into the correct position and pushes it in.

“There!” she says, and Grandad is smiling the most.