

Seeds for Jack, Flowers for Nora

Characters: Jack - an emotionally conflicted 16 year-old boy, the only child of Nora. Reserved and observant, he can tell a lot about a person's character. But his honesty can sting, and he's a lil too slow to realize it.

Nora - a woman in late 40's. Single, working mother of Jack. She is very protective of her mother, and has some unresolved trauma that can cause her to be distant.

Grandpa - Nora's father and Jack's grandad (his only real father figure). A folksy old man who struggled with being vulnerable. A former dead-beat dad, he tried to right his past wrongs the best way he knew how.

Setting: Springtime, circa 2000. It's an early Friday evening, in rural Texas. It's lightly sprinkling as Nora and Jack ride home; both are dressed in funeral attire. Silence hangs in the air of the car with little sound to accompany it from outside; only tiny drops of rain.

NOTES:

- These characters are from the central plains of Texas. The actors' diction should *subtly* reflect that.
- The recommended Radio music Nora plays is "Walkin' In The Sunshine" by Roger Miller.
- The recommended Walkman music Jack plays is "This Time" by Land of Talk.

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(JACK sits in the back seat, listening to his Walkman, the music barely audible to the audience, fiddling with a brown paper package tagged "For Nora." NORA is on the phone with her mother. He is melancholy. She is doing just fine, or at least seems to be.)

NORA

Yes ... You can just drop them off by my house. No, it's really fine, I'll find a place for them ... Yes there are a lot, Momma, but you've plenty on your plate already and-

*(NORA adjusts the rear view mirror to the back seat.
Seeing JACK messing with the package, she snaps at him, as to say 'put it down')*

And having to move them around and water them everyday and well- You *need* to rest. And we'd be happy to take em. I'm sure I could use some flowers to furnish the open house or- ... Yeah? ... I will. You don't have to worry about me ... I know ... Buh-bye Momma.

(NORA hangs up, takes a deep breath, and turns her focus to JACK.)

Hey. *(no response)* Hey, Jack.

JACK

(He slides off his headphones.)

Yeah?

NORA

I'm gonna wait to open that some other time, ok?

JACK

(He puts the package down)

Ok.

NORA

I *said* that I wanted to give it some time, alright?

JACK

Sorry... Is that all?

NORA

(Beat. She's thinking of the right thing to say)

How's school? Uhh... how's that essay you're writing? The one about *To Kill A Mockingbird*?

JACK

Fine.

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(He immediately puts his headphones back on)

NORA

Come on, Jack. Talk to me!

JACK

(He slides one ear off)

About English class?

NORA

About anything. Anything you want.

JACK

(He takes them off and pauses the music.)

Are we gonna talk about him?

NORA

Well, of course, we can, I just- I didn't wanna rush into-

JACK

You wanted to "wait?"

NORA

(Beat.)

I didn't say that.

JACK

Well, it sounded like it.

NORA

No, I was talking about the- *(deep breath)* I was *saying* that I wanted to be sensitive about this, I didn't want to rush you into talking about anything. I know this must be hard for you.

JACK

And it *isn't* hard for you?

NORA

No! I- *(getting choked up)* That is *not* fair!

JACK

Sorry. I'm sorry, I... don't know why I said that.

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NORA
It's fine.

(Beat.)

It's not *easy*. I'm certainly not *happy* that your grandfather died. I feel... grief, it's just... It's different, for me. Alright?

JACK
... Yeah.

NORA

(Beat, composing herself)

What did you wanna say? About Grandpa?

JACK

(Beat. He's thinking of the right thing to ask)

Did you like him?

NORA

Well, I loved your grandfather, Jack.

JACK

Did you *like* him?

NORA

What does it matter-

JACK

I want to know!

NORA

Yes! Yes, I liked him. I liked him and... y'know, the way he could make people laugh. *(under her breath)* Always jokin', 'stead of talkin'. *(to JACK, pandering)* Oh, uh, I liked the *stories*, the ones he would always tell you.

JACK

(Beat. Evaluating)

Are you lying?

NORA

Oh, Jack. *Why?*

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JACK

You are lying! You didn't like his stories. You couldn't stand being in the same room when he was tellin' em.

NORA

Jack...

(Beat. She has no response)

JACK

Y'know... I used to take the drive over to Grandma 'n' Grandpa's just to sit and listen to those stories. That was real nice. It was like he always knew what to tell me. And even when not a word of what he said was *factual*, it felt true. Like it *was* the truth, in a way... Like it was real.

(This is the first time JACK has seemed happy the whole drive.)

NORA

(suddenly cutting) But it isn't real, Jack, you *have* to understand that. He wasn't telling the truth, I always told you, those tall tales were just-

(Silence. JACK turns away, hurt. NORA adjusts the mirror back to the road, and turns on the radio: Country.

JACK puts his headphones back on, turns up the volume on his Walkman, the song fully audible to the audience, and looks out the window. Through the music, we can hear voices.)

GRANDPA

Nifty song there, Jackie.

BOY

Really? Well, Nicholas said it's weird.

GRANDPA

Oh, not "weird." *Eclectic*. It's *cool*. *(BOY laughs)*

(The voices get quieter, fluctuating in & out of hearing.)

Y'know, I knew a guy named *Nick* that ... everyday at school, he would walk up to the *poor* kids, like me, and call em names and whatnot ... dim-witted and filthy and ... You know where ol' Nicky is now?

BOY

Where?

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GRANDPA

Oh, only living in a pigsty. No money, no nothin! *(he chuckles)* Ain't that just the way.

BOY

Nahhh.

GRANDPA

Oh it's true! Saw him with my own eyes. *Heard* him too; can that boy *squeal!* *(they laugh)*

(His voice is now very close and clear)

What're'ya listenin' to now, Jackie?

(Lights reveal GRANDPA is onstage, standing outside JACK'S car door. JACK's music sluffs off, as if submerged or miles away.)

Jack?

(He startles JACK. They are face to face through the window.)

JACK

(silently mouthing) What the fuh

GRANDPA

Well, don't just sit there with your mouth hung open, boy. You look like you done seen a ghost!

(JACK closes his mouth)

Pst. See that lil bag? I want you to open it. *(off his look)* I know, I know, it's for your mother and all, but... I want *you* to show it to her.

(JACK opens the package; sunflower seeds spill out.)

Woah now, careful with those. *(in lieu of an explanation)* Later, later... Go on!

(JACK reaches his hand further and pulls out a letter.)

To her it'll just be another story. Another lie. But you know what I *mean*, Jackie. You always heard the things I- I didn't know how to say myself. Now I need ya to say them to her.

(JACK opens the letter and begins to read.)

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I love you, Jackie.

*(Lights fade out on GRANDPA, leaving JACK alone, seeds everywhere.
All lights up, music only faintly audible from the Walkman, GRANDPA is gone; NORA
turns the rearview mirror and clicks the radio.)*

NORA
Jack! JACK!

JACK
(Takes off headphones, forgetting to pause the music; it continues faintly)
Uh-

NORA
Dang it, Jack what did I tell you?!

JACK
Shit, sorry!
(He tries to scoop the seeds back into the package)

NORA
(indicating his language) Jack.

JACK
I'm *sorry!* Uh, do you have like a ziploc bag or something?

NORA
Wha- no, I don't have anything like that- Are those sunflower seeds?!

JACK
... Yes.

NORA
How? From where?

JACK
The package.

NORA
Awesome. Thanks, Dad. Seeds...

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JACK

There's a note, too. A letter. (*eager*) I can read it for you.

NORA

Y'know, I think I'll read it some other time, thanks.

JACK

When?

NORA

Doesn't matter!

JACK

(*acting "natural"*) Why- why don't I just read it /to you now.

NORA

Why did you unwrap the dang thing when I explicitly asked you /not to?!

JACK

Oh, come on, Mom.

(*Beat. There is a shift in his attitude*)

You weren't gonna open it.

NORA

OH! What is *that* supposed to mean?

JACK

You were just gonna ignore it! Like you ignore him ... like you did when he was alive.

(*Beat. non-verbal reaction from NORA.*)

(*matter of factly; without anger*) When was the last time you saw Grandpa? Last time you spoke with him? When was the last time he was allowed at our house? When I was 8? When- when you and Dad were still /together?

NORA

Watch it.

JACK

But I don't understand. It's always "some other time," it's *always* "later!" ... Until it's just never. You never called him, you never had anything good to say about him, not to me, but apparently you *loved* him? /What?!

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NORA

Jack you- ... You're just a kid, you don't get it!

JACK

(pleading) Really, Mom, I don't get it! Just tell me. What did he do? Why don't you- ... Why don't you *care* about him?

NORA

BECAUSE! Because! He didn't care about me.

(NORA pulls over, turns to look at JACK.

She is manic, and every word is honest, for the first time in the play)

You didn't know him like I did. He- He was not good. To us. May have been a great Granddaddy but he certainly was no father. He left us. Abandoned us. Promised Momma he'd always be there for her, rich or poor, in sickness and health, and he just-

(She just shrugs)

JACK

But Grandma, he and Grandma were still togeth-

NORA

When he came back- ... I don't know- she just *forgave* him. Claimed he was a changed man, and I guess she found it within herself... I did not. I couldn't. When he came back things were different. He was different. I didn't know him... I didn't *want* to know him.

JACK

But he wanted to know you, Mom.

NORA

Oh, please... Stop that.

JACK

Momma, please.

(He moves to the passenger seat, bag of seeds still in hand.)

Listen to this. "Once upon a time-

NORA

Oh, god please /quit-

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JACK

ONCE upon a time... “There was a king. A king who married a beautiful queen, and he cherished her more than all the silver and gold and the fancy things that kings had. They had a lovely child, a princess, who the king loved just as much; More than anything. For a long while, they were happy, but that old king was a fool. Even though he’d promised to take care of his family, he was always afraid. He wasn’t scared of dragons or giants.

(GRANDPA’s voice fades in, reading along with JACK. JACK’s music fades out)

JACK, GRANDPA

“No. He was afraid of himself. The man was scared he wasn’t cut out to be king, that he didn’t deserve the love of his wife and child. Fear whispered in his ear “Y’ain’t strong. Y’ain’t worthy. You ain’t nothin’.” So the fool ran, forgetting love and responsibility, he blindly ran. When he realized his grave mistake, his crime of abandonment was just too awful for his princess to forgive, and she hid herself up in a tower her father could never reach.

(NORA takes the letter and begins to read it herself. GRANDPA is onstage outside NORA’s window; JACK sees him, NORA does not.)

GRANDPA

“So he looked on from below, longing to tell her how proud he was of his girl, who had grown up into a strong, beautiful queen, raisin’ a young prince of her own. Oh how that fool wished he could get to know the woman she became. How sorry and shameful he felt for leaving the girl he knew. How that old fool loved her. Loved her, just the same:

NORA

“More than anything.”

(NORA trembles for a moment, looking at the letter. Slowly, she adjusts her grip on it and tears the note in half.)

JACK

MOM!

(NORA shrinks down, sobbing.)

Momma...

NORA

Ohhh. Why now? Couldn’t you have just told me? Here? Just say it to my face instead of hiding like you always do? Oh and it had to be another goddamned story, didn’t it?!

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(NORA is looking out the window, not at, but past GRANDPA. He watches her.)

God, where do you get off?! I'm a grown-ass woman, I'm not your princess, Daddy! I'm not your little girl! ... You missed that. And now you tell me that you love me? You think you get to say that? And expect me to believe it?

(Looking at the torn letter in her hands, NORA reads the back.)

GRANDPA

“P.S. Seeds for Jack: to plant the tallest flowers in the world. Works like magic.”

NORA

Give me the seeds.

(She rolls down the window)

JACK

... Why?

NORA

I'm not-

(She takes the seeds from JACK)

I won't let you believe another lie!

(NORA throws them out the window, and GRANDPA catches them. She starts the car and drives away; Devastated, GRANDPA exits with seeds.)

I'm not a fool.

(It's quiet, like the beginning, but different: Muffled music playing, wind blowing through the open window, yet no rain; the weather has cleared.

A moment passes, then JACK glances in the rearview mirror)

JACK

(to himself) Holy shit.

(He turns to look out the back window.)

Mom. Mom, stop the car! STOP THE CAR!

(They screech to a halt and jolt forward.)

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NORA
What?!

(JACK is out of the car.)

Wha- Jack!

(She follows.)

The hell has gotten into... *(she sees it)* you.

(A black curtain has dropped, revealing a field of the tallest sunflowers against a bright blue sky.

JACK looks at NORA. NORA stares at the field.

Blackout.)

The End.