

# NANA JEAN

by Tom Smith

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## **CHARACTERS**

Nana Jean	70s
Barbara	22, nicknamed BB

## **TIME/PLACE**

Today  
Nana Jean's house in Pocatello, Idaho

**NANA JEAN**

*Pocatello, Idaho. The living room of a small house that hasn't been updated for a few years. Nana Jean on the couch. Her granddaughter, Barbara, crosses and sits in a chair opposite with a mug of tea. She sees something on the lip of the mug and scrapes it off with her fingernail. Nana Jean looks at her inquiringly.*

**BARBARA**

...Just a little schmutz.

**NANA JEAN**

I'm glad it's just the two of us today.

**BARBARA**

Me too, Nana Jean.

**NANA JEAN**

It's been so long.

**BARBARA**

Since Christmas.

**NANA JEAN**

School still going ok?

**BARBARA**

Oh, yeah. But it's starting to get really busy because of my Capstone.

**NANA JEAN**

What's that?

**BARBARA**

It's a class that's required your last semester senior year. I have to write a really long paper and then defend it in front of the whole faculty. It's super-stressful; everyone's freaking out about it. But it's the last big thing I have to do before I graduate.

**NANA JEAN**

And you're still planning to move to—

*(She can't remember.)*

Oh, hell...

**BARBARA**

Portland. Yeah. Katie's already there waiting for me.

NANA JEAN

You should be very proud of yourself, BB. The first one in our family to graduate college.

BARBARA

*(A little confused.)*

Except for Aunt Grace.

NANA JEAN

Sure, except for her.

BARBARA

Mom's already planning my party.

NANA JEAN

Well, for God's sake, don't let her do the cooking.

BARBARA

Nana Jean, be nice!

NANA JEAN

You know what I'm talking about. Nothing she makes has any flavor at all. It all some kind of gray paste with stale bread on the side.

BARBARA

I blame you! You should have taught her how to cook.

NANA JEAN

She didn't want to learn! She only cared about boys.

BARBARA

Well, that hasn't changed. At least you have me to pass your recipes along to.

NANA JEAN

You like to cook.

BARBARA

That's a big reason why Katie and I chose Portland. It has an amazing food scene.

NANA JEAN

I just pray you can find a job there.

BARBARA

I will.

NANA JEAN

It's not so easy. God forbid you get a job like I had.

BARBARA

Well, Katie had no problem finding something.

NANA JEAN

Sure, because she majored in...um...

BARBARA

Theatre. I took you to that play she did the lights for, remember?

NANA JEAN

She found a job with a Theatre degree?

BARBARA

She's working box office for a big theatre there.

NANA JEAN

Well, you should be able to find something like that with your Accounting degree.

BARBARA

International Business. I dropped Accounting last... I'll be fine, Nana.

NANA JEAN

I know you will, BB.

*(Sees Barbara picking off another crumb from her mug.)*

What's wrong now?

BARBARA

Nothing. I just don't think this mug got cleaned all the way. I'm going to switch cups.

*(She exits into the kitchen with her tea.)*

NANA JEAN

Did your mother tell you what we did last week?

BARBARA (off)

Yeah. She said some of them were really nice.

NANA JEAN

I'm glad she thought so.

BARBARA (off)

She said you liked them, too.

NANA JEAN

I only said that so she wouldn't feel bad.

BARBARA (off)

I know it'll be a big change, but there'll be a lot more things for you to do. Activities, groups, stuff like that.

NANA JEAN

I'm happy here.

BARBARA (off)

You never leave the house.

NANA JEAN

Because I'm happy here.

BARBARA (off)

Mom said you won't even go grocery shopping anymore unless she takes you.

NANA JEAN

Then she shouldn't have taken away my car.

BARBARA

*(Re-entering with a new mug.)*

...You know why she had to do that.

*(Long unspoken moment.)*

Besides, the market's only two blocks away.

NANA JEAN

It's embarrassing. I can't carry more than a day or two's worth of food.

BARBARA

Which is another reason why it's time now. You won't have to worry about any of that anymore.

NANA JEAN

I see your mother's gotten to you.

BARBARA

No, Nana, she hasn't. I can see it for myself.

*(Nana Jean gets offended.)*

Don't get mad at me for saying that! You and I promised to always be honest with each other. You made me swear it when I was ten years old. We tell each other the truth and we tell each other everything.

NANA JEAN

I know.

BARBARA

I called you that time I got caught shoplifting. I didn't call Mom or Dad. I told you about Katie, just like you told me about Cecilia. Before Mom or Aunt Grace or anyone else knew.

*(Nana starts to well up.)*

No, Nana, please don't! I only brought it up because you and I have a very special relationship. So, yeah, Mom's been telling me what's been going on, but she hasn't tried to influence me or anything.

*(Nana rolls her eyes.)*

It's the truth. I just think that it's time you let other people take care of you. Mom can't do it, and you need help.

NANA JEAN

I can still do things.

BARBARA

Physically.

NANA JEAN

I made your tea.

BARBARA

You did.

NANA JEAN

With honey.

BARBARA

It's Aunt Grace who likes honey.

NANA JEAN

No, you do.

*(Barbara shakes her head.)*

...I thought it was you.

BARBARA

*(Crosses over and sits next to Nana Jean.)*

Nana, I know how hard it's been since Cecilia passed. She did a lot for you. None of us knew exactly how much until...

*(Tears begin to well up in Nana's eyes, a mix of sorrow and embarrassment.)*

Oh, Nana...

NANA JEAN

I miss her, BB.

BARBARA

I know you do.

NANA JEAN

She was the one who had things for us to do every day; places to go. The days feel so long now.

BARBARA

Which is why you can't keep living by yourself. These places: they have activities. People check in on you, make your meals. And you'll meet all sorts of new people, make friends.

NANA JEAN

I don't need friends.

BARBARA

Yes, Nana Jean. You do.

NANA JEAN

But I have you.

BARBARA

And you always will. But I don't live here, Nana. And soon I'll be even farther away.

NANA JEAN

You'll still come visit.

BARBARA

Not as much. Portland is ten hours away.

*(Beat.)*

I know you don't want to hear this, but we both have to move on to the next part of our lives.

*(Nana Jean scoffs at this.)*

You knew this day would come; you used to joke about it. "The day I can't mop my own floors, put me in the home!" "The day I can't clean my own dishes..."

NANA JEAN

I still do all that.

BARBARA

No, Nana, not like you should. You haven't been able to for a while. It'll be better for you in the long run.



NANA JEAN

It's not fair! I didn't have time, BB.

BARBARA

Time for what?

NANA JEAN

I didn't have enough time! I got married too young and then I had your mother and right after that your grandfather left. I had to take that God-awful job in the warehouse, working graveyard. And then I got pregnant with Grace and by the time she was out of the house I was almost 60. 60! I didn't even know I was a...

*(Whispers the word.)*

lesbian...until after that.

BARBARA

You don't have to whisper it anymore, Nana.

NANA JEAN

Cecilia and I only had eight years together and it wasn't enough! Not enough to make up for all those years when... And now what? You're moving on to start your life while I'm moving on to end mine. I'm so scared, BB!

BARBARA

I know.

NANA JEAN

You don't!

BARBARA

You don't want to leave your home and that's completely understandable. You've lived here—

NANA JEAN

That's not what I'm talking about! I'm scared I'm going to forget her.

BARBARA

Who? Cecelia?

NANA JEAN

I saw her bible yesterday on the dresser and I couldn't remember why it was in the house. It was like I had never seen it before.

BARBARA

That's ok. You probably just—

NANA JEAN

Cecilia loved her bible! She read from it every day. And there it was, where it's been since she passed and I could not for-the-life-of-me remember why it was there. Who it belonged to.

BARBARA

You won't forget Cecilia.

NANA JEAN

Of course I will. I'm forgetting everything.

BARBARA

You won't forget her.

NANA JEAN

*(Purposefully.)*

How do you know?

BARBARA

I—

*(Looks at Nana Jean. She can't lie.)*

...don't.

NANA JEAN

It's like she's going to die all over again.

*(Beat.)*

And those places, they make it easy to forget. You're not in your own house. Surrounded by your things. You forget. Everything. Everyone.

BARBARA

I won't let you. I'll make sure you remember. I will call you every single day. I'll ask how you are, and then I'll ask if you've thought of Cecilia. I can do that.

NANA JEAN

But you won't. You'll be living your new life in Portland.

BARBARA

You are my life, Nana Jean. And I swear I will do that for you.

NANA JEAN

BB, no...

BARBARA

And even when you can't remember me anymore—

NANA JEAN

No, honey, don't say that...

BARBARA

Even when I fade away, I will still call you. I'll remind you of her every single day.

NANA JEAN

You won't fade away.

BARBARA

You won't be able to stop it.

NANA JEAN

We always tell the truth.

BARBARA

Yes.

NANA JEAN

So I am telling you: no matter what happens in here...

*(Points to her head.)*

my heart will never forget you.

BARBARA

Then it won't forget Cecilia either. Now I'm telling you the truth.

NANA JEAN

Ok.

BARBARA

We will always be there for you. She and I.

NANA JEAN

Thank you, BB.

BARBARA

Thank you, Nana Jean.

*(They share a long look and smile as the lights fade to black.)*

**END OF PLAY**