

FLOWERS

Written by

Scott Sala

Second Draft

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

As a white, thirty something DIRECTOR speaks, we see our subjects enter and introductions are made around the room. The subjects, by all accounts, are everyday human beings.

They showcase a certain amount of awkward unease as the crew attends to them, specifically being mic'd up by the sound department.

MIA, a twenty something brunette, understands the process. She's more worried about the other two subjects than herself.

CHARLES, an athletic and egotistical forty year old, seems to be the most confident and ready to charge in without a second thought.

NICK, an average looking fifty year old, hides any sort of potential unease with a big smile.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

I've been asked to make this film by a friend. She came up with the idea to interview three people who are caretakers to autistic relatives. The idea is to help others who may find themselves in a similar situation.

NICK

My name is Nick.

MIA

Hi. My name is Mia.

CHARLES

Charles.

MIA

My sister has autism.

CHARLES

My son is autistic.

NICK

We found out our daughter was autistic when she was around two-years-old.

CHARLES

Our son was no longer answering to his name. He was no longer looking at us in the eyes.

NICK

She had some language. Little words. Then it all stopped.

MIA

When we were very young my sister had her own room and I had mine. I'm about three years older than her. So I don't remember much about those times, but mom and dad say I did terrible things to get attention because I was jealous.

NICK

We knew something was wrong, but everyone, including our very good Pediatrician, were telling us it was just slow development.

CHARLES

Then there was the flapping...(He demonstrates)...the spinning in circles...

NICK

The biting...the scratching...

MIA

I honestly don't remember dealing with any of that. I remember therapists coming over. They would ask me to participate in exercises. I remember having a crush on one. He was cute and kind of a bad boy. So silly, right? He painted his car black and I think he was in a band.

CHARLES

We were very sure that this was not autism. We did a lot of research. No one in our families had this disease.

NICK

I get asked a lot about family history...and if this rise in autism is just really about people being more aware of the signs.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

Then there are the absolute assholes who believe it doesn't really exist or that some celebrity has found the cure. Fucking celebrities.

CHARLES

My wife refused to believe what was happening. We argued often. We did ultimately agree that we needed a plan of action, regardless.

MIA

Mom and dad would read to us often and I picked it up pretty quick. So Jessica loved coming into my room and having me read to her. Pretty soon I was in her room every night.

NICK

I was very, very lucky early on. I found this book where the writer had a son with autism. This was in, like, the 70's. She went through a lot of experts at the time. One doctor told her his struggles were happening because she didn't love him enough as a baby. What a fucker. I remember also watching this weird made for TV movie. Basically, it was showing this mom who just mimic'd her son's autistic behavior. And that cured him! People are fucking asshats.

MIA

I guess things like bread would make Jess high and kinda goofy. When my parents took the bread out of her diet - that's when she started biting people, she got angry and frustrated -teachers and other kids.

NICK

You can't go to family get-togethers. Your kid is likely to bite another kid or scratch them. Hurt them. She bit me so hard on my stomach once that I pushed her away. Very hard. I just...wasn't expecting it...you know?

CHARLES

You do start to isolate. That has a very difficult effect on your family. Your other children do not get the freedom they should get. You can't have friends over without feeling like you need to hide your son. Can you imagine? It's brutal.

MIA

I was going to school, hanging out with friends. The time I spent at home I didn't really realize how different it was. Not really. I guess mom and dad were able to do that.

NICK

The irony is that in a few years she was the best behaved kid her age anywhere. You could go anywhere and she'd be practically perfect. But that's when you worry about the other kids and what they might do. Make fun of her. Or worse.

MIA

I did notice that mom would get nervous when Jess and I would go off and play with the other kids at family gatherings. But my relatives are pretty cool. If they weren't we'd just go hang out with the adults.

CHARLES

I was a fat little kid. Not fun, to say the least. When I discovered Martial Arts, or maybe the philosophy of Martial Arts, which led to both mental and physical care and well-being, my life completely changed.

NICK

I had a cousin with Downs Syndrome. It's a different thing. She was very sweet and had a crush on me. I was shy as a kid and hated when her sisters would tease me about that. So I ignored her and try to get away from her. I am...ashamed. As an adult I tried to make it up to her.

MIA

Growing up with someone with special needs gives you a different perspective. People my age find things important that don't matter to me. I see her struggles every day and how she overcomes them and is so loving and so sweet.

CHARLES

My son did not enjoy the changes in his diet. First there was the Gluten-Free aspect, which is easier now, of course. In spite of people making fun of it as a fad diet. Then we tried grain only, raw fruit, veggies, smoothies with almond milk...

NICK

It's so hard to get what really helps. Limiting her diet just made her so fucking angry, and, honestly, sad. These kids don't hide their feelings. Then there was the therapy.

MIA

The behavior back then I didn't understand. As a kid I maybe I found it funny.

CHARLES

When he started hitting himself, so hard, we both knew we needed help.

AUTISM SEQUENCE BEGINS

The audience is now subjected to what it's like to have an autistic person's senses and where the focus goes.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

So let's say we're just having a simple conversation like this...

MIA

She may not be able to concentrate on what I say.

NICK

Because...you hear the light buzz?

Nick points out a buzzing sound in the room by pointing his finger up. The sound slowly crescendos to almost drown out what Nick is saying.

NICK (CONT'D)
That, to her, seems as loud as if I started screaming at you.

The sound subsides.

NICK (CONT'D)
She struggles to differentiate.

CHARLES
A bright color..

The color of Charles's shirt magnifies, popping with saturation.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
A flash of light...

One of the background lights suddenly grows in intensity.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
It takes their attention away.

Mia's shot has become a close up.

MIA
I think a reason why they have such a hard time looking you in the eyes..

The audience cuts to an extreme close up of Mia, Charles and Nick's eyes.

MIA (CONT'D)
It's because there's so much going on in there.

AUTISM SEQUENCE ENDS

NICK
I'll tell you what convinced me to do the therapy. It was an experiment that I had read about. Jules, Julia, would like to grab my hand and point it at something she wanted - like do this for me or get that for me. One day she pointed my hand at our light switch and I just, refused to touch it. Man, she screamed bloody murder.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

The neighbors must have thought I was beating her to death. Finally, she gave up. But, the next day, there she was, turning the lights on and off, giggling and so happy.

MIA

Whenever I pick her up from school, it's amazing how different her classmates are. Different, but the same.

CHARLES

There are certain things we know that our kids are affected by - to various degrees. Difficulty in social interaction, communication skills, repetitive behavior...

MIA

They're very sensitive and sweet, and have no filter...

NICK

There's a kid at Jules' school who for some reason just kind of loves me, and he came over the other day, very excited, just to say, "Hey Julia's dad. You're fat!"

CHARLES

So many of their issues are caused by sensory problems.

MIA

I've been proposed to many times. And just asked for big kisses.

NICK

These kids don't feel, hear, see, taste, smell like we do.

MIA

Jess doesn't like surprises. She has a hard time with animals. Not because she doesn't love them, but because they're unpredictable.

CHARLES

So. If we're having a normal conversation like this...

MIA

She may not be able to concentrate on what I say.

NICK

Because, you hear that light buzz in the background? That seems as loud as me screaming at you. She can't help it. She can't differentiate.

CHARLES

A bright color, a flash of light, takes their attention away from you.

MIA

I think a reason why they can't look in your eyes is because there's so much going on there.

NICK

I brought this because I wanted to show you just how differently she sees things. I asked her to draw me a flower and when she was done she called this "Flowers." This is close to pointillism, right?

Nick shows the drawing to camera.

DIRECTOR (O.S.)

So. What do you want families like yours to know? From what you've learned. Each of them need a moment.

CHARLES

My boy turns 17 in a week. I know he's not going to be a great scientist, or athlete, or a husband or...father.

MIA

I don't know. Every moment in my life includes my sister. Good and bad. Mostly good.

NICK

We had this barbecue for dads. I actually couldn't drink that night because I had drank so much before that my stomach was in really bad shape.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

That was a hell of a lot of drinking. But the other guys were partaking. Some more than others. And the food was great. The dad who lived there was Brazilian, so we had Brazilian barbecue. It was amazing. He cooked offal, which is, like, all the parts of an animal you don't normally want to know about, let alone eat. But it was fucking fantastic. Awfully great...sorry. It was the night where you'd be lucky to find a leaf of salad. If I shortened my life by a year because of all the meats I ate it was worth it and everyone there felt the same way. But this one dad. Not that he wasn't having a great time. He was.

He was a well-dressed guy, nice guy. But some guys you can see something trying to get out. Their entire being seems under pressure. This guy was a manager for a clothing store. And the business, like all business now, was having problems. But that wasn't it. He had a couple of beers and he clearly wasn't used to drinking. He was feeling comfortable, too. This was a good place for him, around the guys. And he and I somehow got to ourselves and talked. He told me the story of his vacation to Italy. His wife is Italian. And they brought their daughter with them. She's more in her teens or close to her teens. I guess that mom has refused to believe that their daughter is autistic. I've met a few parents like that. But anyway, he was miserable the entire trip. I guess little girl is overweight and going through all of the difficulty of teen years without any...possibility...of understanding what is happening to her. Teens are hard enough to deal with. This guy wasn't having such a terrible time because of her, though. It was his wife's relatives. You know, this guy really loves his daughter. You can see it in his eyes.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)

The sadness. But his relatives ignored her completely. No attention at all, like maybe she would just go away, and I guess it broke him, because he told me he started wishing his daughter also had Downs Syndrome. Jesus Fucking Christ. And he had really thought about this. Because Downs kids have shorter life spans...and he didn't want his daughter to be here when he was no longer around.

CHARLES

We've tried so hard. You have no idea what it's like to bring a child into this world and have no idea how to help them.

MIA

But lately I've been feeling guilty because I know I need time to be me. I haven't traveled. I haven't dated much - until lately - and that's been difficult. And now I'm afraid. Afraid to disappoint my mom and dad. I love my sister so much. And I know, in the future, when my parents are gone, I'll have to take care of her.

NICK

There is a lot of pain and guilt. I did this to my child. Her difficulties are my fault.

CHARLES

I have failed my son. And the only thing I've feared in my adult life is failure..

MIA

I've met someone. He's amazing and kind and we want to be together. We have the same interests. But he'll be moving soon. He's going to teach English in Japan. As long as I can remember I've always wanted to visit Japan. And he wants me to come with him. Even if it's just for a little while.

NICK

I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. So I came up with the best solution...drinking myself to death.

CHARLES

I'm not an angry person but I suddenly found myself arguing with my wife and relatives. Raging at the smallest things.

MIA

I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do.

NICK

So one day I'm on the couch. And I do this thing lately when I pull my shirt over a part of my face, to hide it, I guess. Jules doesn't like that. So she pulls it back down. I used to think it was funny, but I realized that she just wanted to see me.

CHARLES

My son and I do this thing. We call it "base-foot-basketball." Basically we use the wrong ball for a game. Like hitting a basketball with a baseball bat. It is incredibly silly.

MIA

I have some friends that I talk to. But they don't understand really.

NICK

All she needs from me is to be present. Fully present. When we look at each other there is so much love. Even though she can't keep eye contact long...when there is...

CHARLES

We're both laughing and when I hear his laugh...My heart...my heart...

MIA

My parents are the only ones who understand...and they need me. She needs me.

NICK

And I realized...she's happy.

CHARLES

I watched him and I thought, look at that, all of this anger is just mine. And mine alone.

NICK

And the pain I felt for her...All the missed opportunities...the things that won't happen in her future...she doesn't care about that.

CHARLES

I had to stop fighting a losing fight.

NICK

And I cried, man. I don't fucking cry. And no longer because I was so fucking deeply sad. I cried for a different reason.

CHARLES

In fact, there was no fight. There needed to be acceptance and support.

NICK

My daughter, this unique, kind, individual, that I love so much, human and joyful, was ok with her life.

CHARLES

I've come to understand that we've been on our own journeys.

NICK

That's why I'm here.

MIA

I think I'm going to tell him no. My life feels like it's not my own.

DIRECTOR

I think I know a few people that you'd like to see.

The subjects' AUTISTIC RELATIVES enter frame. Everyone is smiling and embracing one another. Everyone is smiling. Laughing.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)
Everyone is different. Embrace what
makes us special.