Opening 1 / 7

Welcome, all of you. I'm Gordon, Josephine's father, and I have two jobs today: to host this party and to try not to cry before the cake.

Part 2 2 / 7

Thirty years ago, Josephine and I planted a row of sunflowers along the back fence. I read one seed packet, did none of what it said, and put every seed in the ground in a single afternoon. Josephine was eight. She stood beside me with a watering can she needed both hands for.

Part 3 3 / 7

Nothing came up for three weeks. Josephine checked every morning before school. She wrote a report on the dirt. Then one Saturday, forty green sprouts showed up at once, far too close together, and she announced that we had to thin them out. I said we should leave them. She said, 'Dad, they can't all grow tall in one spot.' She was right. She is nearly always right.

Part 4 4 / 7

By August, those sunflowers were taller than the fence. Neighbors stopped to take pictures. Josephine stood in front of them with her arms crossed, very serious, like a tiny foreman inspecting a job. I took that picture. It's on my refrigerator, and it's been there for thirty years.

Part 5 5 / 7

That is my daughter. She sees what will grow and has the nerve to make room for it. Elliot, you have been given that same care. I have watched Josephine thin out the crowded parts of her life to make space for the things that matter, and you are the one she gave the most sun. Welcome to our family. We planted a place for you a while ago, and we are glad you finally came up.

Part 6 6 / 7

To all of you in these chairs, thank you. Some of you traveled a long way, and some of you taught Josephine something along the way. You are the reason this garden is full today.

Closing 7 / 7

Josephine, you were an eight-year-old who knew more about sunflowers than her father. Now you're a woman who knows more about everything. I love you. Please raise your glasses with me to Josephine and Elliot: may you both always lean toward the light, and may you give each other room to grow.