

GRACE

By

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adapted from the short story
WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH A GENERAL
by
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EXT. HOME - DAY (PAST)

It's winter 1997. A younger JOHN, male, late 30's, is recording his family with a camcorder.

Down the driveway, a car with a broken window. Shards of glass on the ground. Muddy bear tracks pressed on the old red paint and trail away from the scene.

YOUNG SAM, male, 7, runs over to inspect.

At the front of the house, a younger LINDA, female, late 30's, comes rushing town the front steps, holding hands with YOUNG CHLOE, female, 2, as she wobbles herself down the stairs. Behind them, GRACE, female, 5, peaks out from the other side of the front glass door.

JOHN (O/S)

You should have left it open, Linda.
Like I told you last time.

SAM (O/S)

(giggling)
Mom! It's like Zero.

Linda scoops Chloe up as soon as they get to the bottom of the stairs. She walks with haste past John, covering her face.

LINDA

John, please.

She scoots down next to Sam, inspecting the bear prints with him.

JOHN (O/S)

Where's Grace?

He turns his attention to Grace behind the glass door at the top of the stairs, nose pressed against the glass.

LINDA (O/S)

Wow, yeah. It is like Zero.

A small Jack Russel Terrier, ZERO, barks by Grace's feet.

JOHN (O/S)

Jesus. Grace! Come out here.

John makes his way toward the front door. He hops up the steps.

YOUNG GRACE

No!

John's standing on the outside, his body holding open the glass door as he holds the camera and grabs onto Grace with his free hand.

JOHN (O/S)

Come on.

LINDA (O/S)

John, don't.

YOUNG GRACE

I don't wanna.

Her whines turn to desperate squeals. She doesn't budge. He lessens his grip.

JOHN (O/S)

The bear's gone. Nothing to be afraid of.

He grabs her arm again. She tries to pull away.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Present day.

A grainy television plays home movies from 1997. It sits atop a fake fireplace space heater. Electronic flames smolder on it's screen. White LED Christmas lights wrap around the fake garland adorn the mantle.

Older CHLOE, 22, lays on the floor with her face glued to the T.V., an older ZERO curled up by her side.

YOUNG GRACE (O/S)

No!

JOHN (O/S)

It's fine!

John sits directly across from the screen, in his favorite recliner with a drink in his hand. Linda sits next to Sam on the couch.

Grace enters the room. She ends a call on her cell phone and slips it into the pocket of an old college sweatshirt.

CHOLE
(to Grace)
You were so cute.

LINDA
We're sorry Andrew couldn't make it.

GRACE
How did you-?

Chloe raises her hand, eyes still fixed on the screen.

GRACE (CONTD)
He would have had to fly back on
Christmas anyway. He has his son the
next day.

LINDA
Oh. Still, we would've liked to see
him.

Grace's eyes are puffy and red. She fixes them on the screen.
Young Grace in a nightgown, sitting on the bottom step of a
staircase.

JOHN (O/S)
How old are you?

YOUNG GRACE
Five.

JOHN (O/S)
What are you doing?

YOUNG GRACE
Making a Flounder house.

JOHN (O/S)
Flounder?

YOUNG GRACE
Ariel and Flounder.

JOHN (O/S)
And who do you love? Do you love your
daddy?

YOUNG GRACE

Yes.

JOHN (O/S)

Who do you love more, your daddy or your mommy? Do you love your daddy the most?

As John began to turn towards Grace, she turned around and left.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Grace begins ripping paper towels off the roll, letting them float down to a puddle on the floor.

John enters the room, watching as she nudges the paper towels along the floor with the toe of her boot.

GRACE

Zero pissed again. Jesus.

Her eyes are puffy and red.

GRACE

Why doesn't anyone clean up the piss? It's disgusting. The dog pisses all over this house and no one even notices.

JOHN

Your mom loves that dog.

Once she's finished sopping up the pee, she kicks the pile of paper towels slightly into the corner and leaves it. John notices.

JOHN (CONTD)

Any news about your bag?

GRACE

The airline sent me a link to this web site to check, but it just says it's still in transit.

JOHN

I can take you to the mall if you want.

GRACE

Um, yeah. Maybe. Thanks.

After a moment of tense silence, Grace's cell phone rings.

GRACE (CONTD)

It's Andrew? Is it okay if I answer this? Really quick. I'm just going to say good night. It's late there.

He nodded, keeping his eyes on paper towels.

GRACE (CONTD)

Hi, sorry.
(lowering voice)
No. I'm in the kitchen.

John tilted his head in her direction.

LINDA (O/S)

Everyone hungry?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

John is the only one seated at the head of a dining room table set for 5 with Christmas themed paper plates and napkins. He sips his drink.

Grace enters holding a murky glass filled with water. She shivers when she places it on the table.

Sam fiddles with a brand new bluetooth speaker and an iPad attached.

SAM

What do you want to listen to, Mom?
Any song.

Chloe enter from the living room, cell phone to her face. John watches as she walks and types. Zero follows behind.

CHLOE

Christmas songs. Put on a Christmas station.

SAM

Mom?

LINDA (O/S)

I liked the CD player.

Linda enters, carrying hot serving dishes of chicken and

pasta into the room. She places them on opposite ends of the table before taking her seat next to John.

LINDA

I knew how to use it.

SAM

But you can have everything that was on your CDs, and more. Anything.

GRACE

Just pick something and play it, Christ.

LINDA

Thank you for setting it up, honey. We freed up all this counter space. We don't need any music right now, we're about to eat.

Sam bends over in defeat, and gets to his seat. He finds Zero next to him.

Grace watches her brother lean over to pet the dog, roughly, under his chin.

GRACE

Can you imagine being a dog? Being ready to die and then just, like, no, you're cut open and they put something inside you, and you're still alive? Maybe he hates it.

SAM

He likes it. He's happy.

LINDA

Gentle, Sammy, gentle.

CHLOE

Stop, you're hurting him.

SAM

God. Calm down.

He stops petting, and sits back hard in his chair so that it scrapes the floor.

Chloe breaks off another corner of a piece of bread and tosses it in Zero's direction. He ignores it.

JOHN
Don't feed him from the table.

LINDA
He hasn't had much of an appetite
since the pacemaker.

GRACE
Not like it really matters at this
point.

JOHN
Don't say that.

Grace fixes her attention to the salad bowl in front of her.
She pinches a leaf of lettuce from the salad bowl and pops it
into her mouth.

JOHN
Excuse you.

Grace looks up at him.

JOHN (CONTD)
We have to say grace.

She looks back to the bowl.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT (PAST)

It's 2006. The same kitchen table is lined with a gaudy table
cloth. The walls to the dining room are painted yellow.

SAM (O/S)
I'll do it.

Another salad bowl.

TEEN GRACE, 14, stares at an untouched, full dinner plate.

SAM (O/S)
Bless us, O Lord. For these thy gifts,
which we are about to receive...

She's thin; one strap from her pink spaghetti top slips off
her shoulder. She turns and lowers her face, shielding
herself as salad leaves and toppings come at her.

SAM (O/S)
...from thy bounty, through Christ...

John, red in the face and looks as though he's yelling, grabs fistfuls of salad and throws it into his teenage daughter's face.

SAM (O/S)
...our Lord. Amen.

Tears flow from her eyes down her face.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Present day.

John opens his eyes. He looks to Sasha and sees she's on her phone.

He grits his teeth.

Grace pokes at the pasta on her dish.

GRACE
Is there cheese in this?

She pushes it to the side of her plate. She grabs her water glass, sniffing it as she brings it close.

GRACE (CONTD)
It smells weird.

Linda serves herself salad. She blinks.

LINDA
Well, get another glass then.

GRACE
Smell.

She tips her glass toward Chloe.

GRACE (CONTD)
See?

LINDA
Get a new glass.

Linda snatches the glass from Grace's hand.

LINDA (CONTD)
I'll get it.

GRACE

Stop, stop, I'll do it, it's fine.

Linda's already stomped out of the room. John sighs. He reaches over Grace to pick up the salad tongs.

Grace flinches. John notices, but continues for the salad bowl. He serves himself.

JOHN

You want to put your ornaments on the tree after dinner? We have them all separated for you.

GRACE

I did them all last night after I got here.

John looks over toward the living room.

JOHN

Are you sure? I could have sworn I saw a box of light-up red slippers. That one's yours, right?

He takes a sip of his drink.

JOHN (CONTD)

I remember how much you loved that movie. Watched it 25 times. More even.

GRACE

What?

JOHN

It's true.

Grace shut her eyes as she cut her chicken.

JOHN (CONTD)

You broke the tape.

GRACE

Pretty sure that was Chloe, Dad.

Grace stares at a piece of chicken on her fork for a minute longer.

She looks down to see Zero's face in between her legs.

She slides the piece of chicken off of the fork and with her

fingers she leans under the table to feed Zero. He sniffs it cautiously. He takes it from her and retreats.

She looks over and notices her father has moved on from their conversation, he eats and listens as Linda talks to Sam about his new car.

There's a chocking sound from under the table. Grace's eyes bulge.

CHLOE (O/S)

Zero!