

GRACIE SMILES

19-DE04-W22

A shy Christian girl must find the courage to deliver a faith-based speech to help her anti-Christian teacher see her need for Christ.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - 6TH GRADE CLASSROOM - DAY

A banner that reads "Winter Festival" hangs amidst paper snowmen and glittering paper icicles. The 6th grade STUDENTS complete the final touches on the decorations.

GRACIE, a shy Christian girl, sits with her friends PETER and HOPE glittering paper icicles.

PETER

I can't wait to play the carnival games at the festival. I earned 28 tickets and I'm using them all on the Jumpshot game. I want to win the autographed basketball.

Peter crumples up a piece of paper. Aims for the trash can. Score!

HOPE

With 28 chances, you should win it. I earned 32 tickets. I think I'm going to try all the games. How many tickets did you earn, Gracie?

GRACIE

A few.

PETER

A few?

Peter looks at the tickets-earned wall chart. Fifty-two stars under Gracie's name.

PETER (CONT'D)

You have more than anyone!

HOPE

Gracie. You should play the baseball pitching game. With your arm, you'd win the life-size teddy bear!

Gracie holds up the icicle she made. Big smile until all the glitter falls to the ground.

MS. SAMUELSON, the 20-something teacher who the students refer to as "the nice drill sergeant", sits at her desk. She drags her red pen across the paper. Clearly disappointed with the paper she's grading.

Ms. Samuelson straightens the stack of graded papers. Rises from her chair.

She drops her red pen into the memorial ceramic penholder that bears a picture of her cat and the years 2005-2019.

MS. SAMUELSON  
Attention class.

The Students cease their art activities. Give her their full attention.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)  
Your passion speech is due  
tomorrow. Congratulations to those  
who chose an appropriate subject.

Ms. Samuelson parades among the students handing out papers. Face down. No student touches their paper.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)  
The student with the see-me note on  
their speech draft needs to stay  
after and speak to me. We must talk  
about how to improve it.

Ms. Samuelson makes eye contact with Gracie.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)  
I don't want to have to keep anyone  
from the festival activities  
tomorrow. Do you understand?

Ms. Samuelson places Gracie's paper down on her desk. Gracie's head drops.

STUDENTS  
Yes, Ma'am.

MS. SAMUELSON  
The rest of you may go at the bell.

Students flip over their papers. Sighs of relief echo through the room. Gracie turns over her paper. "See Me" is written in red ink.

Bell rings. The Students race toward the door leaving Gracie in the wake.

Gracie gathers her things. Pen, notebook, scissors. Puts them in her backpack.

As Gracie moseys to Ms. Samuelson's desk, she trips. Her swinging backpack knocks over the cat memorial penholder.

Gracie reaches to save it.

It hits the floor. Breaks.

Ms. Samuelson looks up horrified. Gracie hangs her head.

GRACIE

I'm so sorry, Ms. Samuelson. I'll  
buy you a new one.

Gracie picks up the broken pieces. Attempts to fix it. Ms. Samuelson sucks back the urge to be cross.

MS. SAMUELSON

(calm)

You have all the required elements  
in your speech, Gracie, but I'm  
afraid the subject is unacceptable.  
You may not talk about God or  
Jesus. Presenting a speech about  
God or Jesus, would cause distress  
for the other students. You would  
not want your friends to feel  
uncomfortable, would you?

Gracie stares at the broken penholder in her hands.

GRACIE

No, Ma'am.

MS. SAMUELSON

You have worked hard; earning 52  
tickets for the festival. Are you  
willing to throw away an afternoon  
of fun? Surely you have other  
passions.

Gracie's stare remains on the broken penholder.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)

You are one of my brightest  
students, Gracie. I want to give  
you a chance to change the outcome.  
Take some time tonight to write a  
speech about something you know  
more about.

Gracie hangs her head without a word.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)

I hear you're the star player on  
the baseball team. Why not share  
about your passion for baseball?

Gracie lays the broken penholder on Ms. Samuelson's desk.  
Leaves. Ms. Samuelson sobs over the broken pieces.

INT. GRACIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gracie lies on her bed. Eyes well-up.

DAD (O.S.)  
Thank you for letting me know.

Gracie's DAD stands in the doorway.

DAD (CONT'D)  
Just got off the phone with your  
teacher.

Gracie doesn't move.

DAD (CONT'D)  
Do you want to talk about it?

Gracie doesn't move.

DAD (CONT'D)  
What do you call a car that's made  
out of a trampoline?

DAD AND GRACIE  
A jumpdrive.

Dad makes a rim-shot sound with his phone.

No smile from Gracie.

DAD  
This is serious. That joke always  
gets at least a grin. The speech  
dilemma is that bad, huh?

Gracie rolls over. Wipes a tear.

GRACIE  
I'm supposed to give a speech on  
something I'm passionate about. I'm  
passionate about my faith in Jesus.  
Why is that wrong? I don't get it,  
Dad.

DAD  
Being passionate about Jesus is not  
wrong, Sweetie.

Dad looks around Gracie's room. Spots her Barbie dolls and  
Barbie's car on the top shelf. Grabs it.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 People don't realize they need  
 rescuing. Or they do and it scares  
 them.

Dad blows the dust off the car. A little cough for effect.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 God can see the whole picture, so  
 when he sends us into a situation,  
 He knows what will happen. All we  
 need to do is obey and go.

Dad puts Barbie in the driver's seat.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 Take Barbie, for instance...

Dad rides the car along Gracie's bed.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 Barbie is texting. Driving too  
 fast.

Dad adds major drama that almost causes Gracie to smile.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 And along comes you.

Dad puts another doll in the car's path. Waving a red sock.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 "Stop!" You yell. "There's a cliff  
 up ahead." Now Barbie can listen to  
 you...

Dad brings the car to a screeching halt.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 ...or ignore you.

Dad "revs the engine". Maneuvers the car around the Gracie  
 doll. The car drives off the edge of the bed.

DAD (CONT'D)  
 Standing in the road warning them  
 that they are headed to their death  
 is our responsibility. The path  
 they choose after that is theirs.

Dad picks up the car. Puts it back on the bed in front of the  
 Gracie dolls. "Revs the engine."

DAD (CONT'D)  
There's a cost to following Jesus  
and sometimes it feels unfair.  
Sometimes they won't listen and  
they'll run you over...

The car runs over the Gracie doll. Dad gives the Gracie doll  
crazy hair and contorted limbs.

DAD (CONT'D)  
...but you need to conquer fear,  
stand up for your faith and trust  
God.

Dad dramatizes the Gracie doll rising up from the ashes.  
Limbs straight. Hair smoothed out. Dad's dramatic antics make  
Gracie giggle.

DAD (CONT'D)  
Obey Jesus and he will make you  
content no matter what the result.

Gracie breathes a deep sigh.

DAD (CONT'D)  
I will step in and talk with the  
school if you want me too. That  
choice is yours.

Gracie wraps her arms around Dad.

GRACIE  
I love you, Dad.

DAD  
I love you too, sweetie.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Dad pulls up in his car.

INT. DAD'S CAR - DAY

Dad switches off the ignition. Gracie sits quiet. Hugs her  
backpack.

DAD  
What do you call two banana peels  
on the floor?

DAD AND GRACIE  
A pair of slippers.

DAD

That one was pretty bad, huh?

Gracie lifts the corners of her mouth.

DAD (CONT'D)

Wait. Do I see a smirk?

Gracie sighs.

DAD (CONT'D)

I will wait for you to enter the school before I pull away. If you want to retreat back to the car, I'll be here...

Gracie hesitates.

DAD (CONT'D)

...with a lot more Dad-jokes.

Gracie reaches for the car door handle.

EXT. PUBLIC SCHOOL - DAY

Gracie moseys toward the entrance avoiding eye-contact with everyone.

She stops.

Looks back at her Dad. Sighs in the valley of indecision.

The sound of a kitten's cry reaches Gracie's ear. Gracie looks around then zooms in on a kitten trapped in a bush.

Gracie pulls a scissors from her backpack. Crawls under the branches. The branches catch her hair.

Gracie cuts the thorny twigs.

She reaches for the kitten.

Rescued!

Crazy-hair Gracie sits on the grass. Cradles the frightened kitten. When suddenly her eyes grow to the size of saucers.

Gracie puts the kitten in her backpack. Waves to Dad with a smile. Runs in the entrance.



PETER (V.O.)

My granddad taught me that although being a basketball player works better when you're tall, use your smarts to outwit the opponent.

INT. PUBLIC SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Peter is decked-out in basketball attire.

PETER

In conclusion, I am passionate about basketball because it reminds me of spending time with my grandpa.

The Class applauds.

MS. SAMUELSON

Good job, Peter. You earned 28 tickets plus 5 more for that amazing speech.

Ms. Samuelson hands Peter a fist full of tickets.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)

Gracie. You're next.

Gracie smooths down her crazy hair. Takes the kitten from her backpack. Struts to the front of the class.

Ms. Samuelson's roughly repaired memorial cat pen holder catches Gracie's eye. Gracie hugs the kitten and grins.

GRACIE

Would you rescue a trapped kitten?

Gracie holds up the kitten. The class awe's.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

This little guy was completely helpless; tangled in the thorns of a bush. He had no hope of survival until a hand reached toward him and pulled him out.

Ms. Samuelson beams with approval.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

That's what Jesus did for me.

Ms. Samuelson's smile immediately drops to a frown.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

God sent His only Son to reach into  
the thorn bush that I was tangled  
in.

Ms. Samuelson rises.

MS. SAMUELSON

Gracie. We talked about this...

GRACIE

He saw my struggle when my mom  
died. I prayed and Jesus helped me  
feel better.

Ms. Samuelson backs off. Looks at her students. Every eye is  
fixed on Gracie. Still as statues.

Gracie turns to Ms. Samuelson. Holds up the kitten.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

Are you willing to be rescued from  
the thorn bush you're in?

All eyes on Ms. Samuelson.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

This kitten was happy to be free.  
Jesus gives freedom to everyone.  
All you have to do is ask him. Then  
you can rest in his arms.

Gracie pauses. Ms. Samuelson is clearly uncomfortable. Gracie  
turns to her classmates. Hope and Peter cheer her on.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

In conclusion, I am passionate  
about Jesus because He rescued me  
and I want everyone to know that He  
wants to rescue you too.

The students break out in applause. They file forward to pet  
the kitten. Ms. Samuelson tries to stop them, but the  
students plow past her to reach Gracie.

MS. SAMUELSON

Class. CLASS! That is enough.

The students turn to Ms. Samuelson.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)

Gracie. What did I say about your  
subject matter?

GRACIE

It was unacceptable because it would cause distress in the other students.

The students pet the kitten. Joyful. Excited.

MS. SAMUELSON

You know the rules. Any incomplete work means you lose the privilege of attending the festival.

Ms. Samuelson waits for an apology from Gracie.

MS. SAMUELSON (CONT'D)

Everyone is dismissed to the gym except for Gracie.

PETER

How come Gracie can't go?

HOPE

I loved her speech.

The students mutter in agreement.

GRACIE

Thanks everyone. It's okay. Go. Have fun.

Her classmates give the kitten one final pet and file out. Gracie stands alone with kitten in hand.

MS. SAMUELSON

You worked so hard to get all your assignments done so you could go to the festival. Why would you throw it all away?

GRACIE

My Dad taught me that some things are more important than what I want.

MS. SAMUELSON

Go to your desk and read a book for the rest of the afternoon.

GRACIE

Yes, Ma'am.

Gracie pauses. Looks at the ill-repaired pen holder and then back to the kitten in her hands. She extends the kitten toward Ms. Samuelson.

GRACIE (CONT'D)

He needs a home.

Ms. Samuelson accepts the kitten. Gracie, head held high, returns to her desk and sits, grabbing a book.

Ms. Samuelson loves on the kitten. Does a poor job of sucking back the tears.

Gracie delves into her book when a fist-full of tickets pop in her view. Gracie looks up surprised.

MS. SAMUELSON

And 5 extra for an amazing speech.

Gracie accepts the tickets.

GRACIE

Thank you!

Gracie heads to the door.

MS. SAMUELSON

How did you know I needed this sweet fur-ball?

Gracie stops. Turns.

GRACIE

I didn't. But Jesus knew.

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

Gracie leaps through the door. Peter spots Gracie. Races toward her with a big smile. Gracie waves her tickets at Peter.

PETER

I tried that prayer thing. I asked Jesus to help you come to the festival. And here you are! Tell me more about Jesus.

Gracie smiles.