

# GRACE

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Celeste Bonfanti

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**SYNOPSIS:** On a park bench, Jeremiah, a young runaway, encounters Veronica, an elderly woman wrapped in a quilt of memories. As he hears her story (lovingly recalled through the patches of her quilt), he finds himself drawn out of his own troubles and into her tale of homelessness and family lost. The end of this brief encounter finds the youth and the old woman linked in a bond of new friendship and mutual assistance.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(1 MAN, 1 WOMAN)*

VERONICA (f).....An elderly woman who has lost her home. Veronica’s experiences have aged her more than her years, and she may be played anywhere from 60+.

JEREMIAH (m).....A teenage boy who has run away from home. Jeremiah is not your typical runaway. He is clearly unaccustomed to “hard times.”

**AT RISE:**

*VERONICA, an elderly woman, is huddled on a park bench. It is winter, and she is keeping warm beneath a tattered wool hat, pulled low. Wrapped around her is an old quilt. A plastic carrier bag beside her clearly holds all her worldly goods. She is humming “Amazing Grace” to herself and rocking gently, eyes closed.*

*ENTER JEREMIAH, a boy in his middle teens, dressed for the weather, with a large backpack and rolled-up sleeping bag. He notices VERONICA, and after a moment, recognizing the song, hums along. VERONICA opens her eyes to look at him with a smile but does not stop her rocking or humming. The song finishes and there is a pause while both regard the other.*

**VERONICA:** Mercy, mercy. A boy that knows his hymns.

**JEREMIAH:** Amen.

**VERONICA:** Where you going, boy?

**JEREMIAH:** *(Pause.)* Nowhere. Mind if I join you?

**VERONICA:** *(Pats the bench beside her.)* Don't need no reservation.

**JEREMIAH:** *(Sits and lays backpack and sleeping bag on the ground beside him.)* Thanks. I'm Jeremiah. *(Extends hand.)*

**VERONICA:** Jeremiah. Powerful name. I'm Veronica.

**JEREMIAH:** Nice to meet you, Veronica. Would you like an apple?

**VERONICA:** Not with these teeth, honey, but thanks all the same. *(JEREMIAH opens his backpack and takes out an apple and a paper towel. He gradually eats the apple, carefully wrapping the core in the paper towel and returning it to the backpack. VERONICA regards the pack and sleeping bag.)* Lordy. For a boy that's headed nowhere, you sure did bring a lot with you. *(JEREMIAH smiles sheepishly.)* You know your hymns. You know your Bible?

**JEREMIAH:** Some.

**VERONICA:** Then you ought to know that the good Lord takes care of His own. Ain't nothing you got to worry about. “Consider the lilies of the field.” He'll provide.

**JEREMIAH:** You have a lot of faith.

**VERONICA:** Mercy, yes. About all I have . . . that, and my family.

**JEREMIAH:** (*Surprised but not wanting to show it.*) You have family?

**VERONICA:** All around me. (*JEREMIAH looks around - - VERONICA laughs.*) Land sakes, boy, not there. (*Twitches quilt.*) Right here. Holding me close day and night. Yes, sir. (*Fingers a patch.*) This here? This here's my boy Andrew. He's a teacher down in Mobile. Used to live in this old denim jacket. When it finally wore out I made him a little pillow out of most of it, and I kept this.

**JEREMIAH:** (*Touches quilt.*) You made this?

**VERONICA:** Mercy, yes. Ain't nothing I couldn't sew before the arthritis.

**JEREMIAH:** Andrew . . . does he keep in touch with you?

**VERONICA:** He did when I had an address. I ain't told him. I ain't told him about that devil landlord - - ain't no way I could afford to stay when the rent went up and up and up. Come fall I just couldn't pay no more. No, I ain't told Andrew. He'd only worry and start sending money he ain't got, no sir - - not with five kids to feed, not on an Alabama teacher's salary. His little one's just three years old. Miranda, she's called. I made her a little dress when she was born and sent it out there. Miranda's right here. (*Fingers another patch.*) She's the prettiest little thing - - leastwise in her pictures. I ain't met her face to face.

**JEREMIAH:** Veronica, don't you think you ought to tell Andrew about . . . well, about . . . everything? There are agencies that can help you find somewhere cheaper to live. Andrew could help you with all of that. I mean, if you were my mom . . . (*A memory stops him.*)

**VERONICA:** What is it, honey . . . ? You got troubles?

**JEREMIAH:** (*Shaking himself back into the present.*) Not anymore. (*A cell phone rings - - JEREMIAH looks at his backpack, then at VERONICA. He does not take the call, and the ringing stops.*)

**VERONICA:** You can't outrun them, you know . . . Troubles have a way of catching up with you. A mighty name like "Jeremiah" . . . you don't want to spend your life running, child.

**JEREMIAH:** Believe me, I'm not "mighty." Not in any way. Not much of a student, not much of an athlete . . . not much.

**VERONICA:** (*Pats him.*) Don't you worry, honey. The good Lord has a way of making something out of "not much."

**JEREMIAH:** Tell me more about your family.

**VERONICA:** To save you from thinking about your own . . . ? All right, then. (*Fingers a patch.*) This here? This here's my Sam. Lived half his life under a car. I had a job finding a length of work shirt without a smear of grease on it, but here he is. When he put that wedding ring on my finger, he fretted that he still had grease under his fingernails . . . as if I'd mind . . .

**JEREMIAH:** Is he . . . gone . . . ?

**VERONICA:** Seven years ago last Wednesday. But don't you worry - - he's right here. And my mama? She's keeping him company. (*Fingers a patch.*) Lord, how she cried when this old yellow dress finally wore out! I couldn't understand it then . . . I was just a small fry . . . but I do now. If anything happened to this old quilt, I'd roll over and die.

**JEREMIAH:** (*Touches her.*) Veronica . . .

**VERONICA:** I would. I would. 'Cause then I'd be all alone. (*Long pause.*) What about YOUR mama, child?

**JEREMIAH:** Oh, don't you worry about her. She's fine. SHE'S not alone. She has . . . him.

**VERONICA:** And he's not your daddy.

**JEREMIAH:** No, ma'am.

**VERONICA:** And now two men in the house is too many.

**JEREMIAH:** It never was when she was with Dad.

**VERONICA:** That's different. Your daddy's your daddy. And this here fellow, he ain't. Where's your daddy?

**JEREMIAH:** He's in Germany. He's worked overseas for a year now.

**VERONICA:** And so you packed up and left, and you won't pick up your phone because you know in your bones it's your mama. And you know that if you picked up and you heard tears in her voice, you would have to turn around and head straight home again.

**JEREMIAH:** How do you DO this? How do you know?

**VERONICA:** Child, look at you. Kitted out for the Himalayas, expensive jacket, good strong boots, knapsack full to bursting . . . you got rosy cheeks and bright eyes and all the marks of a child somebody loves. She LOVES you, Jeremiah. And if she loves him, too, well, that's between the two of them. Your mama LOVES you. And she's probably sick with worry.

**JEREMIAH:** You're a fine one to talk! Your son loves you, too, and you haven't even told him what happened. How do you think he'd feel if he knew his mother was living on the street? I'm sure he's worried, too. He hasn't heard from you. If he calls your number, all he'll get is that recording: "We're sorry - - the number you are calling has been . . ."

**VERONICA:** *(Puts a hand up to his mouth.)* Hush, now, child . . . ! Hush, now! *(Begins rocking again, eyes closed.)* There ain't no call to get yourself all worked up. He's right here. *(Pats quilt.)* I talk to him every day. Mostly we laugh about old times but sometimes . . . sometimes we talk about me going to visit him and all them beautiful grandbabies. Sometimes . . .

**JEREMIAH:** Call him.

**VERONICA:** Hush, now . . .

**JEREMIAH:** Call him. *(Fumbling for the phone.)* Call him and tell him.

**VERONICA:** Don't you fret about me, Jeremiah. The good Lord's looking after me just fine. You got troubles of your own to tend to.

**JEREMIAH:** *(Hands her the phone.)* Call him. Do you have the number? Do you need Information?

**VERONICA:** I got everything I need right here. *(As she nestles into the quilt, the phone rings. VERONICA answers before JEREMIAH can stop her. He hunches on the bench, elbows on his knees and hands over his face, as she speaks.)* Hello . . . ? My name is Veronica . . . Yes, he's right here. But he's afraid to talk to you because he don't want to come home . . . No, he don't, and if he hears your voice he just might have to.

**JEREMIAH:** Please hang up.

**VERONICA:** *(Into phone.)* No, I can't give him the phone because he'll only hang up . . . But he does love you . . . It's only that he doesn't know how he fits into your new life with the new fellow.

**JEREMIAH:** Oh my God . . . .

**VERONICA:** Yes, ma'am, right here in Fletcher Park, South Middleboro - - near the duck pond . . .

**JEREMIAH:** I don't believe this . . .

**VERONICA:** Yes, he's just fine . . . we've been having a good, long crack. He's a wonderful boy. I'm sure you're very proud of him. *(Looks at JEREMIAH - - aside.)* She is.

**JEREMIAH:** I give up. *(Puts hand out with eyes closed - - VERONICA gives him the phone.)* It's me, Mom . . . Yeah, I'm fine . . . I know, I know, I just . . . Okay. Look, can we talk about this later . . . ? Yeah, okay . . . Oh, and Mom . . . could you make up the bed in the guest room . . . ?

*He and VERONICA look at each other and "Amazing Grace" begins to play. BLACKOUT.*

**THE END**