

## Amazing Grace (Story 1)

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Grace was amazing.

The most amazing thing about her was that Grace wasn't even her name. But that's what everyone called her, because she was AMAZING. She was born on a Tuesday and everyone knows what Tuesdays child is.

A client list full of prestigious people and companies, she could choose who she worked with and when. She was the 'go to' person whenever the problem was difficult or complicated or just plain impossible. People would fall at her feet just to be granted an audience and sing Graces praise.

Business magazines clamoured for interviews and all the gossip columns speculated about her, Vogue wanted to photograph her and everyone wanted to know her beauty secrets. Grace politely declined all such overtures with a smile. She didn't blog, she wasn't on Facebook or Twitter or LinkedIn or WhatsAp or Instagram.

Those evenings when she wasn't entertaining at the latest hot restaurant or going to an even hotter party or play, she would return to her beautiful home.

In the morning she would leave envelopes full of cash or the occasional cheque on the pristine, granite worktop: the daily, the gardener, the florist. Every day for Pat, on a Thursday for the gardener and Friday for the florist who would leave simple but beautiful arrangements in each room. Arrangements that only Grace would see but would fill the house with their gentle perfume. Clare, the florist, knew exactly what Grace liked and more to the point what she didn't: no orange, no lilies except the waxy, white arum lilies that Graces mother grew in the family garden in Kent. Definitely not the ghastly stargazers with their pungent, heady aroma and blowsy appearance.

The gardener did all the usual things: kept the grass short, the borders weed less, and pruned, mulched and watered the roses, peonies and lavenders that were the mainstay of the garden. He had asked if he could introduce hydrangeas and against her better judgement she agreed. He was right: the limelight, vanilla fraise and Annabelle weren't like the old-fashioned hydrangeas of her youth. They didn't look musty and Victorian; they were fresh and modern and vibrant.

Pat, the daily, was probably the one who knew Grace best. She washed Graces silk underwear by hand, took all her stylish but classic suits and blouses to the dry cleaners, filled her 'fridge with fresh ingredients that Grace could turn into a simple meal when she needed to and ensured that there was always a bottle of Pouilly Fuise chilling. But months would go by and their paths wouldn't cross.

Walking through the village that she had lived in for over twenty years but seeing no one she knew by name. Except the hairdresser: every six weeks he would refresh her blonde highlights bright shining as the sun while she listened to the local gossip never knowing who they were talking about and envying them their trivial lives. Lives full of children and husbands and neighbours and friends. Or the beautician who would dab glorious pillar box red on Graces dainty toenails. Red nails, her father definitely would not approve. But there had been much in her life that he did not approve of and red toenails were so far down the list not to matter anymore.

Her immediate neighbours would invite her for drinks every now and then so they could bathe in her glamour while secretly both envying and feeling sorry for her. The immaculate house, not a thing out of place. No dog hair, no children's toys, no odd ornaments that had been gifts that even though you hated you knew that you couldn't part with. Did anyone notice the small, plain silver frame containing a photograph of a young woman somewhere in the sunshine smiling and gazing with

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adoration at whoever was taking the photo? The silver on one corner rubbed away as, sometimes without even knowing she did it, Graces fingers would flutter to the frame as she passed.

Her own drinks party was always held on the last Sunday before Christmas – it was the invitation that everyone wanted. The best wine, cocktails for those who didn't know better and canapes provided and served by whoever was the latest up and coming young chef. No Christmas tree, no holly. Just a few tasteful cards on the mantelpiece. And when everyone had left, on the stroke of three, she got into her car with a medium sized suitcase and wasn't seen again until 2 January. No one knew where she went and those who asked were met with a smile and the offer of a top up on their wine.