

Amazing Grace (Story 4)

Her son, Adam, was only a few months old when Ellen realised that something was not quite right. Gradually he stopped meeting her eyes and seemed to stiffen up instead of nestling into her arms. The months and years passed and he grew more and more locked into himself with occasional outbursts of frustration with guttural shouts and wildly lashing arms. Despite their heartbreak she and her husband Tim resolved to give him the best life it was in their power to give him.

The stray was brought into the rescue kennels in a wretched, bedraggled state. Thin to the point of emaciation and covered in tangles, sores and mud. A man had found her shivering outside his backdoor after a storm. He had wrapped her in a towel and brought her to the centre. The vet said that it was only `by the Grace of God that she had arrived just in time – another day and she would have been beyond saving`. She had no collar or microchip so there was no way of tracing her former owners and so they called her Grace – after the vet's remark.

The staff cut off the tangled, filthy fur to her skin, treated the sores and wrapped her warmly. They cleaned her ears of the evil smelling gunk and bathed her encrusted eyes. Gradually her coat grew back long and glossy. Her ears recovered although it was found that she could prick up only one of them. Her soft brown eyes cleared, opened wide and the doting staff found her gaze mesmeric.

Grace stole the hearts of everyone but strangely she was not adopted until, one day, a lady came to see if she could find any dog suitable to become a therapy dog.

Grace looked at her and there and then her future was planned – she would find a home.

Grace was brought to meet Adam. Adam did not look up. Grace stood still and looked at him. She took a few steps forward and wagged her tail gently – but she did not go too close.

The second visit was almost a repetition of the first but Grace went a little closer. Adam glanced at her from under his eyebrows.

By the fourth visit Grace slowly approached Adam and leaned up against his leg. He put his hand on her head.

Grace moved in.

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The relationship between boy and dog grew very slowly but steadily. He would allow her to lean against him and lick his hand. He would gently stroke her head.

Every morning he watched his mother as she groomed Grace, stroking and talking to her all the time. One day Adam picked up the brush and took over the daily session. He did not talk but made soft sounds.

It was after Grace had been with them a month or two that Adam had one of his night terrors. Ellen and Tim ran into his room to try and comfort him but a streak of black fur rushed by them and jumped on the bed. Grace stretched out beside him – her body pressed close into his with a front paw over his chest. Her nose was under his chin and she gently licked his neck. Before many minutes the tension drained out of him, his shouting stopped and his flailing arms sank and he held the dog close. His parents watched in wonderment as it usually took them an hour or more to calm him.

Grace's bed was moved into Adam's bedroom.

The next night, for the first time in years, Ellen and Tim slept through – relaxed and unworried - knowing that Adam would be looked after.

Usually, in the evenings, Grace lay on the floor with Adam as he sprawled on the carpet; sometimes watching the television, sometimes with a book. One evening Grace left him on the floor and went to sit between Ellen and Tim on the settee. She nestled in with her head on Ellen's lap. She stayed a while and then returned to the floor. It took a couple of weeks before Adam joined her on the settee between his parents and soon he was relaxed enough to lean against his mother and allow her arm across his shoulders.

Gradually the friendship between the boy and dog deepened until, one morning, while out in the garden, in the sunshine, Adam raised his head and looked straight into Grace's eyes – the first direct eye contact he had made since his baby days. He did not smile but Ellen knew – she knew – that one day he would.

Ellen choked back hot tears. For once her tears were not of sorrow for the life her son would never have but tears of relief, of joy, of hope.

Grace, this amazing, precious dog was unlocking her son.