



Amazing Grace

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She is leaving, and he's not going to stop her. Not this time. Let her go. If she wants to go and be alone, let her be. She won't last the night. She'll miss his voice. She'll second-guess every decision she made up until this point, and then after time she'll convince herself that he is evil and stupid. She'll leave, and he'll let her go. He bets he won't second-guess anything. Not this time. He won't cry now or beg. And he will not take anything back. He can't find the right words to say to her, and honestly, he doesn't have the energy to search for them anymore.

He refuses to miss anything about her once she's gone—not her hands or her ways. Her painfully flawless eyes will not cross his mind. Her funny, fantastic walk, the way she strides with her chin perfectly parallel to the pavement, her “tough guy” persona, her smile—none of it will phase him. He is like a rock, and he will not be moved to reconsider. No memory, no matter how perfect, will influence him to call her. She's leaving; let her go and don't watch her walk away. Yes, he wishes things didn't come to this. And yes, he'll feel like crying, but he will never confess to it. He will not plead. He refuses to fall on his knees, not this time. Sure, she'll leave him with nothing; but he has worked with less.

He is surprisingly unscathed by this charade. He feels calm, cool, collected. And as he watches her scramble around their apartment throwing shit in bags, her clothes, his clothes, the dog's food, his bowls, CDs, he looks at her and he realizes that she isn't so tough. Let her go. Anyway, she'll be back tomorrow. She won't last through the night.

It is funny how you can step out of yourself sometimes and look at yourself participating in a certain situation and become a critic. It is funny not in a ha ha sort of way, but more like oh, I've been diagnosed with lung cancer and I've never smoked a cigarette in my life kind of funny – it really isn't. It is sad and it is disappointing. It is surreal. Nine times out of ten you see yourself acting like a fool and it is no fun. He wishes she could see herself now.

“I wish you could see yourself,” he says to her. “You're so disappointing.”

“Disappointing, huh? In what way exactly?” It is a valid question so he feels okay with responding.

“You don’t live up to the image of you that I create. I am realizing for the first time that you never have. And it isn’t your fault. I am the one who created the image. You were bound to disappoint me sooner or later. I think it best that you’re leaving.”

Silence.

He says, “Leave the dog, Grace. He’s my dog,” and he walks away from her into the bathroom, the white, white bathroom and he shuts the door. He sits on the white toilet and stares up into the white ceiling and feels like a triumphant victor on his throne. And as he hears the front door slam shut with finality, he picks out a color pallet in his head for the bathroom walls. They need some color.

The morning after he wakes up alone but not lonely. Of course as soon as he opens his eyes, no actually before he even opens his eyes, the imagery of the night before plays in his mind like a silent motion picture, the only difference is in his mind he can hear the noise of it all. His heart is irritated by the fact that before he even opens his eyes he hears her voice. Amazing Grace how sweet the sound; still, he’s not lonely.

The dog is whining. He needs to go out. Damn dog. He gets out of bed, slips on his boots and wanders into the kitchen. Grace would’ve already had the coffee started by now. “Where’s your leash,” he says to the dog. The dog runs to the back door and sits down. He can barely sit down because his tail is wagging so fast. He really has to go. He looks all over for the godforsaken leash, the \$23 leash, the “oh we have to get it, honey it’s purple” leash, and he can’t find it anywhere. Meanwhile the dog is whimpering, and his tail’s wagging so hard he is positive it’s going to take off in flight. And there is no coffee. Still, he’s not lonely. Anyway, she should be calling anytime now. And he can’t sound frustrated when he answers the phone. If only he could find the fucking leash. “Where in the hell is the leash!” Damn dog.

The phone rings and he answers it trying to sound breezy. “Hello.”

“Hey.” She was trying to sound breezy, too. “You take the dog out?” Her tone was off. She sounded like she was trying to hold back a sneeze.

“Yeah.”

She does this. She calls as predicted and proceeds to converse as if it were a normal Saturday morning, like nothing happened. He can remember when they used to spend their Saturday mornings making love, when things were still new; the beginning stage of a new relationship

when bluebirds sing at your window and you uncontrollably doodle hearts all over your CPA report. This is not a normal Saturday morning, however, so why does she try and sound so damn breezy. He wonders if she is trying to hide the fact that she is wrong? It's too late; he already knows she's wrong. She's wrong in so many ways, but that's beside the point. As he holds the receiver to his ear, he wonders what is the point... of the phone call. Why is she calling? Unless it is to tell him where in the god forsaken apartment the leash is, then he really doesn't want to listen to anything she has to say. Especially if it is something cliché like I'm sorry or can we work it out. He has things to do like moving on with his life and making a run to Benjamin Moore. So he asks her why she is calling, and she doesn't say anything at first. He makes a mental note of the date and time because this is a revolutionary moment – Grace Leigh Locheart, speechless. Something is terribly wrong, he can feel it. In spite of himself he inquires. "What is it? Is something wrong?"

She asks him to come by her house. She tells him she isn't feeling well, and she knows that they are on the outs and that their relationship is over but still she needs him there. She confesses to missing him, wanting him. And as she lies there, on top of her blanket of clowns, she makes her first incision just below the palm of her left hand.

In spite of himself, he concedes and agrees to meet her. He puts down the phone and to the left of it lies the purple leash. He'll bring the dog. And some soup.

In her heart she knows that it is over. It doesn't come as shock to her or a disappointment; it just comes, like dusk. Not even Jack can deter the sun from setting no matter how hard he tries. Last night Jack realized what she already knew; there is no true darkness here. When the sun begins to set and its light becomes less and less, this is the time when you can truly see. This is the time when you can look beauty in the eye and not be blinded. And if you stare long enough you will see the sun disappear and give way to a new light and it will rise in its place, beautiful and brilliant. Jack realized that there was nothing to be afraid of so he let her go. You'll never know, dear, how much I love you. Please don't take my sunshine away. She smiles at the irony of it all, she is too tired to laugh. Jack will be there soon. She makes her second incision just below her right palm, this time not as neat.

Grace lay there bleeding. She takes great pride in her appearance this morning. She is wearing a midnight blue A-line dress, light makeup and her hair swept up in a bun. On her left wrist she wears a sterling silver linked bracelet with only one charm, her name. It was a gift from

Jack. She lies there, lovely and dying. She waits there in her deathbed for him feeling calm, placid. She decides to close her eyes just for a few minutes, just until Jack arrives.

Jack pulls into the driveway an hour later. He gathers up the dog and the soup and climbs the front steps and pauses at the front door. He is hesitant to ring the doorbell, he really doesn't want to do this, to see her. He doesn't want to be hexed by her, fooled into a doomed existence with her once more. He has a weakness for her, and he hates himself for it. But he also harbors a hatred for her that compels him to go inside; it will be good to see her sick, pale and sweaty; it will comfort him reminding him of what lust looks like in its true form. He will find renewed confidence in his decision break it off. With these thoughts, he rings the doorbell.

When there is no answer, he lets himself in. He calls out for her several times. He gets no response. The dog pulls him up the staircase lined with framed photographs of dead family members. The stairs reached up onto the landing where the photograph of Grace sits welcoming you to the second floor. He thinks to himself that these people are right out of a book, picture perfect.

To the left a blue bathroom. Jack makes a note to himself to himself that a blue bathroom is out of the question. To the right is Grace. Down the hall, last room on the right. The dog can smell her; Jack can smell her. The dog leads the way, and Jack follows, tomato soup in hand.

Jack watches the dog disappear around the corner and enter Grace's bedroom. He doesn't follow; instead he staggers just before the doorway collecting courage from his toes. He takes a deep breath and turns the corner. "I brought soup. Grace?"

She is asleep. She looks like an angel in her sleep. Jack looks at her from the doorway and admires her dark blue dress; it is one he has never seen. It accentuates every curve, every line of her body. The sun's rays sneak in through the closed blinds and land on her bare arms, chest and legs; it makes her olive skin gleam with beads of sweat. He stares at her lips, pink and parted ever so slightly as if she tasting honey for the first time. Amazing Grace. How sweet. . . Oh God. He stiffens. He walks toward her with his right hand in his pocket, his left hand holding the soup and whispers her name, "Baby." It's happening, the hex, it's starting. He corrects himself, "Grace."

The dog begins to whine. Grace has yet to greet him. Something's wrong with mommy. Jack moves slowly over to the bed taking baby steps as if he were walking a tight rope, quiet as so not to wake the dead. He is inches away when he finally notices the blood. Tomato soup

splatters on the ground around him, along with reason and sound. There is so much blood, too much blood. Someone was there. She's been murdered. She's been cut. Pools of damp maroon surround her waist and thighs and she is drowning in them, sinking into death. Bloody clowns smiling, beckoning her to their world of stillness and nothingness. He can do nothing but breathe, watch. She looks young and innocent, and Jack is surprised once more by the quietness about her. It is as if, even in death, she should be reaming him out or whining, but she lies silent, innocent and young. It is when he finally blinks that he notices the wounds on her wrists. It is when he sees the wounds on her wrists that he commences to smile. It is when he realizes that she is not breathing that he begins to laugh. He steps back from the bed, disoriented now. He says aloud, "This isn't happening. What's going on?" As he turns to leave the room, he is shocked by his next thought, which comes without remorse: better off dead – because it becomes evident to him that his Grace is indeed dead. Finally.

Jack leaves the room, then the house. He doesn't call anyone or report anything. He feels it's best to let her loved ones "discover her," that way they will have a story to tell. I hadn't heard from Grace in a couple of hours and I just knew something was wrong and when I walked in the room. Jack would prefer not to have to repeat the events of the day to anyone, ever. Jack would prefer not to ever have to speak her name again. He will not miss her, not her hands or her ways. Her painfully flawless eyes will not even cross his mind. Her funny, fantastic walk, her "tough guy" persona, her smile – none of it will phase him. No memory, no matter how perfect. . . .