

# Amazing Grace

## By Bradley Walton

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## AMAZING GRACE

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**CAST: The SINGER, female or male.**

**AT RISE: On a bare stage, the SINGER stands in a black dress or suit.**

(sings) “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound/that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found/was blind but now I see.”

(speaks) It was the favorite song of my mother, and her best friend, Thelma. A couple of times a year, I’d sing it for them at church.

People in the congregation would come up to me afterwards and say things like, “That was beautiful,” or “I was so moved.” Of course, they weren’t talking about me. Maybe they thought they were, but ... no. It was the song, not me. It wasn’t until years later I finally understood that.

The one person in the church who was consistently unimpressed was Thelma’s daughter, Sara, who was a year older than me. Despite our moms hanging out together constantly, we moved in different social circles at school. We got along okay, but we were never really friends.

Sara had this ironic smile, like she thought that everything was a joke, and she was the only one who was in on it. Whenever I’d sing “Amazing Grace” at church, she’d watch people come up and talk to me after the services, and she’d smirk and shake her head. Then one day she said, “You’re singing’s not bad, but some of these people need to get a life.” I should have been more offended on behalf of the congregation than myself, but of course, I took it personally, and pretty much stopped talking to her after that. Not that I think she noticed. She had plenty of other people to hang out with.

Sara was kind of a wild child. She drank. She partied. She spent a lot of time with a lot of different guys. And she was determined to do whatever she wanted on her own terms.

One night in the middle of the winter, Sara went to a party. From what I heard, she got drunk and snuck off for a while with a guy named Chad. When Chad’s girlfriend, Cindy, found out about it and confronted Sara a couple hours later, there was a fight. Cindy lost—the fight, her boyfriend, and her dignity. Sara knocked back a couple of celebratory shots, got in her car, and drove home. She hit a tree going seventy miles an hour.

She died.

But in an operating room at the county hospital, miraculously, they brought her back.

Sort of.

Sara was in a coma, and things were touch and go for a while. To my surprise, it was a really tough time for me. Even though Sara and I weren't close, our families were. We all blamed Sara, and we felt guilty about it, even though there was no question she was at fault. I'd like to think that most of the tears that were shed were for Sara and not because of her, but I can't say for sure.

We all waited for Sara to come out of her coma. We were hoping for another miracle. Three months later, we got it. Sara woke up. Everyone knew that things were going to be tough from there on out. That Sara would probably never quite be her old self again. That she would need therapy. And a wheelchair. That the real work was just beginning. But we had our miracle.

Sara had no memory of the night of the accident, and her recollection of her life in general was sketchy and incomplete. Her short-term memory was ... well, it was gone. She needed constant reminders of who people were. She would start a conversation, then start it again five minutes later. It was hard. Even though she looked like Sara, she wasn't really Sara anymore. At least, not the Sara we'd known.

As horrible as it sounds, the changes weren't all bad. Where Sara had been snobby and arrogant before, now she was humble and appreciative. She loved to give hugs. There was no irony in her smile. When she said, "I love you," she genuinely meant it, and she said it to everyone. Her automatic response to every single person who walked through her door was unconditional love. And even though her helplessness and memory loss sometimes made her difficult to be around, we all loved her back. It was impossible not to.

Sara was in the hospital for another four months after she woke up. We all took turns keeping her company. Occasionally some of her friends from school would spend an hour or two with her, but that happened less and less as time went on.

One evening, I was playing a board game with Sara in her hospital room when a teenage girl walked in. Sara looked up with a curious but welcoming smile on her face. It was obvious that she had no idea who this person was, but I did. It was Cindy. The girl from the party on the night of the accident.

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I think my heart stopped. I had no idea what to say or do, and all I could think was, “Why me? Why do I have to be the one here? Why not Sara’s mom? Or my mom?” It was a pretty selfish thought.

Sara grinned. She was delighted to have a new visitor. “Hi!” she blurted out. “Do I know you?” There was no awkwardness in the question. Only an excited curiosity, as if she was unwrapping a present that might contain some lost treasure or keepsake.

Cindy walked slowly and quietly into the room.

“Yeah, you know me,” she said softly.

“Are we friends?”

Cindy stared down into Sara’s innocent, smiling eyes. There was a long silence, and finally, Cindy said, “Yeah. We’re friends.”

“What’s your name?”

“Cindy. My name is Cindy.”

“I love you, Cindy.”

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