



THE GRUMPY OLD MAN AND THE FOSTER DOG WHO NEVER LEFT

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*“The one absolutely unselfish friend that man
can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him,
the one that never proves ungrateful
or treacherous, is his dog.”*

— George Graham Vest

My husband loved to be on the go. Throughout our marriage he was a commercial driver. At first, he drove a taxi, then stretch-limousines, and finally, eighteen-wheelers. As much as Kenneth loved returning home, he enjoyed being on the road, which is why he became a grumpy old man when he had to retire. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow when he learned he had to give up all driving due to health issues. After a year he became bitterer, complaining from the time he rose in the morning until he went to sleep. I was at my breaking point trying to find ways to cheer him, until a miracle happened.

Our neighbor asked us to foster his Chihuahua for three weeks while he moved into an apartment and then had gallbladder surgery. He scheduled the procedure so he would have his Thanksgiving break to recover. His dog, Heavenly Joy, had a shorthaired, sand-colored coat, and one black paw. Heavenly Joy was about six pounds and only five inches tall with ginormous, erect ears and large, prominent eyes.

Devoted to her owner, she spent the first few days in our home sulking or shaking. First Kenneth was annoyed, so he ignored her. Slowly, though, the Chihuahua’s shy personality warmed his heart. Soon, Heavenly Joy was zooming around our living room, pouncing

on toys, and sniffing everything when Kenneth took her on walks. He also found her to be the perfect size for tucking under his arm, and soon she did not leave his side.

Thanksgiving came, and we packed up Heavenly Joy's belongings, but her owner did not show up nor did he return our calls. We tried to reach him for several days before someone posted online that he had died from gangrene after his operation. No one in his family was willing to take the dog, so I was left to find her a permanent home. She had originally been adopted from our local animal shelter, but I could not imagine returning her there. Since Chihuahuas can live up to twenty years, and she was only two, it seemed like a huge commitment for us to keep her.

While I was searching for another home, Heavenly Joy was basking in all of Kenneth's attention. He took the time to pet and play with the dog at least once a day, focusing fully on her during playtime.

He also created a daily routine to help ensure that she got plenty of water, food, and walks. Christmas came, and Kenneth hung a stocking for her, as well as making sure she had many gifts under the tree. At that point, I realized that our foster dog had come to stay.

In the two years since then, her shyness has given away to a sassy attitude, and she loves to love. She is loyal and wants to be around Kenneth more than anything else. She lives very much in the present, she doesn't worry about tomorrow, and her happiness tends to rub off on him. Heavenly Joy truly was heaven-sent and Kenneth's life without her would be diminished.