

Cooper Meets the Dogfather

by
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EXT PUPPY MILL - SPRING AFTERNOON

Larry is a clean cut thirty year old gentleman in a sport coat and slacks that has stopped in to see some dogs on his way home from work. He is walking with Larry, a man almost twice his age with a gray beard and dark eyes that barely show under his tattered hat. His faded overalls and work boots show he is accustomed to being on his knees in the dirt. They are walking among the dog pens behind an old one story house sitting on a large heavily wooded area. They stop to look at a gold Cocker Spaniel that has caught the young man's eye.

LARRY

This is a beautiful golden Cocker Spaniel. When is she due?

KEN

(Speaks with strong southern drawl)

You got a good eye for dogs there. That's Grace. She's won a couple uh dog shows in her time and her father won multiple best of breed championships in his day.

LARRY

Impressive. I can see why.

KEN

That's not the end uh it. The puppies were sired by King over there. He won a championship 'bout six years back. We have all tha paper work on the dogs here. So you have more than a pet, but a potential money maker if ya catch ma drift.

LARRY

So when is she due?

KEN

Oh she should be due any day now. But we have ta hold on ta the puppies for 'bout eight weeks before you can take 'em home.

LARRY

Why is that? I mean... If you don't mind me asking.

(MORE)

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LARRY (CONT'D)

This is the first time we've ever tried buying a puppy this young.

KEN

Oh yeah. Ya ain't the first, won't be the last. We try ta help our customers know much as they can 'bout their puppies. Afta all they're part uh tha family right?

LARRY

So true. And this one will be special as its for my daughters birthday.

KEN

We has to let 'em stay with their mother for the first eight weeks so that they can be weened and grow healthy on their mother's milk and be imprinted in the ways of a dog. That way they know how to behave around others and understand real dog behavior and pack life.

LARRY

OK. I see. So we can put a deposit down on one of these existing puppies or wait and chose one from Grace.

Ken has a greedy happy look come across his face as he watches Ken count out three hundred dollars in front of him.

KEN

Yep. You're an expert in the business already.

Ken begins to get closer to Larry as he is staring at the money and begins to reach for it.

LARRY

Based on what you said about Grace and King, I think I'd like one of hers.

Grace looks up in horror as she knows this means that she will be losing yet another of her litter.

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LARRY

But this is for my daughter so I think I will let her chose for herself.

Larry turns away, folds the money back up and puts it in his jacket pocket walking away as Ken is left grasping at air. Ken's face frowns as he begins to escort Larry to his car. Ken doesn't realize the latch the pen was left ajar where the female dogs were kept.

GRACE

Everyone! This is our chance. He left the door unlocked again. This is our chance. Go! Go! Go!

Grace pushes the gate open with her nose and the dogs begin running in different directions away from Ken who is grumbling to himself near the edge of the long driveway watching as Larry and the money drive away.

GRACE

I won't be able to keep up with you all. Go on without me. I'll hide and make my escape later.

The remaining dogs locked in their pens begin barking uncontrollably. The anxious tone and commotion draws the attention of the Ken.

KEN

What's all the yappin' about?! Shut! Oh no, the dogs!

Ken scans the grounds spotting the dogs running free as Grace lumbers under the porch watching from a small crack between the boards.

KEN

Harold! Ralph! Help me get the dogs. They got out again. Hurry!

Ken's two brothers come running out of the house and begin to look around to assess the situation. They grab their cages and begin looking for the runaway dogs.

Ken looks around suspiciously and stares at the porch and begins to walk towards it.

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KEN

Grace? Here Girl. Where are you?
I'm sure she isn't far and I don't
see her out there.

He crawls on his knees as he gets to the porch and tries to look under the porch into the darkness.

KEN

This will be her last litter as
she's not producing enough pups
anymore. Time to get ridda her
after this set arrives.

Ken begins to reach under the deck trying to feel if there is anything underneath.

KEN

Grace? You under there girl?

His hand gets very close to Grace and she begins to show her teeth poised to bite his hand. Just as she is about to bite he pulls his hand back as he hears his name being called.

RALPH

Ken, hurry up and bring some more
of those treats and another cage.
We got a few and we can get the
rest with some help.

He gives one more suspicious look under the deck.

KEN

Awright. I'm comin'. Thought
Grace mighta been under here.

Ken gets up and walks on top of the porch going back inside to get more supplies to help catch the escaped dogs.

FADE OUT.

EXT WOODED FIELD - EVENING

Rain is pouring down in sheets against the dark backdrop of the night sky. Lightening bolts leap from cloud to cloud to light the sky, outlining a small Dog figure on a hill making its way down towards an old warehouse below.

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GRACE

If I can just make it to that building. I can finally take a rest.

Grace walks through a tattered hole in the side of the abandoned building. She is dragging her body through looking exhausted.

Grace finds an old worn out coat and drags it into the corner under an old desk. Tired she collapses on the old coat in a ball to try to warm herself.

GRACE

Thank goodness, I got away from those awful people.

Grace gently licks her belly in an effort to comfort the puppies waiting inside. She begins to talk to her belly in a very comforting voice.

GRACE

They don't care about you all the way I do. I love you and we haven't met each other yet. But I know you can feel it and hear it in my voice.

Grace shudders from the sound of thunder just outside the warehouse that causes the windows to rattle.

GRACE

Oh it's awful outside, but I know they'll be out looking for us.

She continues talking to the puppies in her belly again.

GRACE

I had to take a chance and try to escape so you all would have a chance to be free. A chance to grow up together as a family.

Grace lifts her head with pride, and tilts her chin up in the pose of a show dog

GRACE

You all are so very special to me. More than property, more than things to be bred, and sold off like toys.

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Pausing to stand up and shake her fur free of the last remaining water.

GRACE

My dream is almost a reality.

Grace yawns and tries to get comfortable nuzzled deep in the coat. Her eyes begin to slowly close and her talking gets slower with each passing moment.

GRACE

All I want... is that you all get
to grow up... happy... free...
together... and... loved.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT WAREHOUSE - LATE NIGHT

Grace wakes from a sound in the distance. She is still as a statue, ears perked up and her nose is wiggling as she sniffs the air. Lighting lights the warehouse to show the silhouette of a man approaching. It comes closer and lighting lights the warehouse again to show Ken's face.

KEN

Thought I wouldn't find ya huh?

Grace begins to growl and bark at Ken.

GRACE

I'm not sure how you found me but
I'm not going back.

Grace stands up and begins to back away.

KEN

Hey Grace. It's okay. I'm here
to take ya home. I know you're
cold and scared. If there's
anything I know... I knows dogs.
Heck I think I knows dogs better
'an I know people.

Ken is carrying an old beat up metal dog cage, just big enough to carry her.

KEN

C'mon girl those puppies uh yours
will be a mighty fine pedigree and
bring a good amount uh money.

(MORE)

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KEN (CONT'D)

We got the rest of 'em. Now it's time for you to come home too.

Ken slowly puts the metal cage down and opens the door to the cage.

KEN

After all, that's why we take care of you old show dogs. It's the least you can do for us feedin' ya, taken' care uh you dogs when nobody else wants ya. Now c'mon, you know whut ta do girl. Get in dis here cage and less go home.

I'm cold, tired and hungry just like you. So let's quit foolin' 'round and go home.

Ken pats the top of the cage and throws a doggie treat inside. He begins to smile as he sees her instincts to sniff overcoming her and her need for food tempting her.

KEN

Come on. You know you're hungry. Come get a nice tasty treat. Those pups are hungry too. Think about them. Good girl... Come on a little more.

Ken edged his way closer, but it only makes Grace grow more agitated. She stands her ground and begins to show her teeth and growl low and quiet.

GRACE

I'm not giving up my babies. I know that man is coming back.

KEN

Honest little lady, I ain't gonna hurt you none, just let me bring you home and everything will be okay. You can have another litter of pups in no time. You won't miss them long.

Grace's tail is not moving, her fur is raised and her teeth are showing as she begins to growl and bark louder.

GRACE

This is my last warning.

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Ken lunges to grab her. He misses and the wet slick concrete floor causes him to slip and land on his hands and knees.

Grace runs behind him as he tries to reach for her and bites hard into the backside of his pants.

KEN

Woow! Why you little...

He quickly tries to get to his feet, as Grace refuses to let go of her grip on the backside of his pants.

KEN

Get off me you... you flea bag.

Grace finally releases her grip on him and backs under a set of stairs where he would not be able to reach her without risking another bite.

GRACE

Reach under here and let's see how well you can count to ten after that.

KEN

I don't care about you and those pups. Ya ain't worth the trouble no ways. You're only good for four pups at the most now anyway.

Brushing himself off, picking up his hat and placing it on his head.

KEN

Heck it costs more to take care of you now than you're worth.

Kicks over a pallet and snatches up the cage.

KEN

None ah us ever liked you and your snooty attitude anyway. Like you think you're better 'an us. That's why we was sendin' ya to the pound after this litter anyway.

He begins a low sinister laugh as he is walking away into the darkness of the warehouse continuing to talk as he leaves.

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KEN

Wait til ya meet the real world
and have ta take care uh yourself
and 'em pups.

Grace struggles to see him as she tries to watch him as he disappears.

KEN

You and those pups won't last more
'an two... three weeks tops.

He pushes the cage through a large gap. He crouches down and crawls backwards out into the rain with one last parting shot.

KEN

You think we's bad.
(chuckling)
You'll be wishin' you was back
home. You'll see.

Grace cautiously crawls out and pulls the coat into the safety and darkness under the stairs.

FADE OUT.

INT WAREHOUSE - EARLY MORNING

Grace is surrounded by four little wiggling bodies of fur but the fifth puppy isn't moving. Concerned, Grace nudges him gently with her nose but He doesn't move. The mother dog, leaned over him, and started to lick his head. Suddenly, he starts to move, and Grace gives a huge sigh of relief.

From behind Grace two mice are coming to help. One has a 9 volt battery strapped to his back and the other has two makeshift paddles in his hand with wires leading to the battery. They show a sign of disappointment that they will not be of assistance and toss their medical headbands down in disgust and walk back out of view.

Grace turns her attention to other puppies in the bundle of squirming fur. Grace is looking on her five puppies, all with various coats of Buff, gold and gold and white crests of fur. She lays her body down to recuperate.

INT WAREHOUSE - TWO WEEKS LATER

Grace is speaking to her five puppies, all are half listening as they are tossing, turning and biting each others ears and tails.

GRACE

Everyone. We are not the only ones using this place. We must be careful and make sure that they don't see us as we don't know their intentions.

SPENCER

Well how do we know if the things are good or bad if we never go meet them?

GRACE

It's so hard to know. Those things are called humans. Some are good and some are bad. You just never know.

BELLA

Well if we never meet them how will we ever know?

GRACE

I don't know. I just don't know. We'll figure it out. Just not today. Cooper. Cooper were you listening?

Cooper is startled from his game of tail chasing and biting. He is oblivious to everything she said.

COOPER

Huh? Uh yeah. Big things good, other things bad. Got it!

Grace shakes her head in disappointment. She then pauses and motions for the puppies to return to the safety of their shelter under the stairs.

GRACE

We'll just continue to share the space safely. We can play when they're gone. But we stay here at home when they are inside.

INT WAREHOUSE - HOURS LATER

SPENCER

Hey guys, they're gone. You wanna race? We can use their course for our race.

Spencer is pointing to the track and talking very excitedly.

SPENCER

The first one to finish the obstacle course wins.

Winston and Cooper answer in unison.

WINSTON AND COOPER

Oh that sounds like so much fun.

WINSTON

Yeah we can all have a race, c'mon, c'mon lets go, lets go.

BELLA

OK, so what are the rules?

OLIVIA

And where is the start and finish?

SPENCER

First we have to slide down the sheets of wood on the staircase, then we run across the floor to the piece of wood that runs up to the wooden crate. Run across the wooden crate and slide down the piece of sheet metal, then run up to the concrete blocks placed in a half circle.

Takes a deep breath to continue.

SPENCER

After that we run up the wooden barrel cut in half that's on a wooden crate, and down the barrel on the other side of it. Next, we jump over the pile of dirt and run around the outside edge of the tires. After that we jump on the bench and run across it and go down the wooden door leaning on the end of the bench.

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All the puppies have looks of increasing confusion as they listen to the quickly delivered and very confusing set of course instructions.

SPENCER

(arrogantly speaking)

We run around the corner swing on the rope across the puddle. After that we run up the other sheet of metal to the picnic table, across the beam, and slide down to the floor to the finish line. I will wait at the finish to see who comes in second.

OLIVIA

So let me see if I have this straight. We start here, go around the course and come back where we started from for the finish?

SPENCER

Uh... well yeah I guess. If you want to get technical and want to dumb it down.

Bella and Olivia look at each other and giggle.

BELLA

Boys and directions.

OLIVIA

Yeah, they have to make things so complicated.

Winston shouted across the room to where Grace was sitting watching her busy puppies.

WINSTON

Mama, tell us when to go. Oh and watch to see who wins.

Grace smiled and began a graceful show-dog prance to the center of the room so that she could be heard easily.

GRACE

I would be most honored to assist.

The five puppies line up at the top of the staircase, right where the wooden sheets started.

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All with their faces low to the ground, butts high in the air and tails wagging furiously

Grace stands on her hinds legs, paws in the air.

GRACE
(Shouting loudly)
Puppies... On your marks

The puppies look at each other slightly confused.

COOPER
What's a mark?

SPENCER
Heck if I know!

GRACE
Get Set...

Grace drops down and flops her ears in an effort to simulate a starting flag.

GRACE
Goooo!!!!

Spencer leaps off the line with more power than any of the other pups. Cooper was the last to react and tried to thrust so hard off the line that he launches himself off the line with a loud toot from the rear.

The other puppies begin laughing from the sound.

BELLA
Oh that's so gross Cooper!

Grace watches on from her central spot as they are bumbling and stumbling cute balls of fur.

COOPER
I may be the smallest, but I have heart. I will whiz by you when you least expect it!

Cooper then flies past his two sisters, ears flailing in the wind and his tongue hanging out the side of his mouth.

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ZOOM IN ON COOPER

Cooper slides down the hand rail on the stair way, rather than try to run down the stairs like spencer. As he slides down the handrail, he picks up considerable speed.

Cooper looks like his head is hanging out the window of a car with his fur slicked and pinned back against his head. He comes off the handrail through the air overtaking Spencer.

Olivia and Bella copy Cooper, sliding down the handrail but overshooting the landing that Cooper used.

As they are flying across the room they are looking at each other in the air with a look of despair.

Spencer looks at Winston just in front of him and leaps on his back and pushes off him to gain an edge and jump over an obstacle that becomes a crashing point for Winston and he is now out of the race.

SPENCER

(laughing as he
continues the race)

That's what happens when an
unstoppable force sees an
immovable object!!!

Two mice come to his rescue quickly putting him on a makeshift stretcher and taking him off the course for attention.

SPENCER

Looks like it's just you and me
Cooper.

Spencer is the Alpha male of the litter and Cooper is the runt of the litter, and it shows not only in their size but the physical strength displayed in their strides and attitude. Copper is happy having fun, while Spencer is serious and contemplating his next move to take the lead.

Cooper, looking back over his shoulder at Spencer can see that he is in for a tough race and that Spencer plans to win by any means necessary

SPENCER

Careful Cooper, you don't want to
make a mistake that gets you
trapped.

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Cooper looks ahead to figure out what he was talking about and quickly realizes his brothers plan... He is going to try to trap him under a milk crate by knocking the stick out from underneath the box as it is propping the box up.

COOPER

Thanks for the warning Spencer!

Cooper slams all four paws down causing himself to spin on the slick concrete floors. Spencer loses focus as he watches his brother quickly drop off behind him and he crashes into the milk crate as it drops down on him.

Cooper utilizes his momentum and jumps on the box, leaping across the finish line.

COOPER

I may not be the biggest or strongest... but I am definitely the smartest.

GRACE

You are very special Cooper. I saw that the moment you were born.

Grace gives him a gentle kiss and holds his paw up as the winner.

GRACE

You are going to be able to accomplish all your dreams.

Grace is talking as she is nudging the milk crate over on the side to help Spencer crawl underneath to freedom.

GRACE

Each of you are very special and together there isn't anything you can't do. Always remember that and never, ever forget that.

FADE OUT

INT WAREHOUSE - AFTERNOON

Grace is entering back into the warehouse coming back from venturing out for food that she finds discarded by people living in the near by neighborhood. She brings back a crumbled bag that contains a few left over bones.

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Grace gives each of them a loving nudge and lick. Grace then sniffs them to further reinforce their smell.

There appears to be a hint of colored dust that lifts off them as she sniffs them. Each puppy has their own unique color. She is interrupted as she hears a noise. Grace looks out across the warehouse trying to find out what is creating the sound.

GRACE

No, not now. Don't tell me they
are after us.

Her floppy ears raise and she stands like a statue trying to focus in on the sound that she hears getting closer to the warehouse with each second.

GRACE

How will I keep my babies safe
this time?

She is getting slightly nervous as she believes it is the men from the Puppy Mill.

GRACE

It will be too difficult to
protect them all.

FROM GRACE'S POINT OF VIEW

Trevor, a handsome twelve year old boy, squeezes his slender frame through the hole where Ken had exited the warehouse. Trevor pushes a skateboard through first, then follows behind. Grace cautiously watches while staying hidden from view.

Grace is intrigued by his activities, as he is trying out stunts on his skateboard on the obstacle course with limited success.

Show montage of funny, yet painful failures.

She watches as Trevor tries and tries, getting frustrated, not quitting but getting better each time.

GRACE

(quietly talking to
herself)

He has the dedication of a show
dog, but the grace of a Saint
Bernard. But there is something
about him.

(MORE)

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CONTINUED: (2)

GRACE (CONT'D)

(pauses)

I have to find a safe home as we can't stay here forever. Maybe he can help.

Grace begins to wander out from the security of her hiding spot. She is slowly, cautiously sniffing the air as she begins to walk up to Trevor.

Trevor catches movement over his shoulder from the corner of his eye. He is pleasantly surprised to see Grace.

TREVOR

Hey there! What's your name?

Trevor pauses almost as if waiting to hear a response. He looks down at his skateboard and rolls it away with his foot. He then slowly reaches out with his hand as she begins to sniff the blue dust that begins to waft in the air towards her.

TREVOR

What are you doing in this building all by yourself?

Grace continues to creep slowly towards Trevor constantly sniffing his hand, arm, shoes and legs. She licks his hand and welcomes the feel of him rubbing and petting her head. Grace's slow blinking shows that she indeed enjoys and misses the feel of a caring caress. She is comfortable with Trevor and feels at peace with him by her side.

TREVOR

You are such a beautiful dog. You must belong to someone. I'm Trevor. You need a name.

Pauses to think of a good name.

TREVOR

How 'bout I call you Lady?

He gives Grace a couple more rubs along her head. Then they both hear a group of kids coming.

TREVOR

Lady, you better go back to where you were hiding. I'll be back later.

Trevor points away, motioning for her to go back in the direction she came from.

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Grace walks back across the floor and disappears into her hiding spot. Grace looks back to confirm she was doing as he wants.

TREVOR

Man, she follows directions really well.

Grace looks on contently as she watches the four boys practice. Her view shows the entire obstacle course that the boys have built and use for their stunts.

INT WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The kids are ending their practice session and are ready to leave.

KID ONE

I don't know how much longer we'll be able to skate here guys. My Mom said they are going to demolish this place so they can build more houses.

The kids talking among themselves, their conversations and voices all intermingling.

KID TWO

(moaning loudly in response)

C'mon man! Where are we going to be able to skate if they get rid of this. There are too many houses here already anyway.

KID THREE

Look on the bright side, maybe we might make some new friends.

Grace raising her head and tail wagging quickly in response to hearing Trevor's voice.

TREVOR

Well until then. Let's make the best of it guys. It's not like they're going to listen to a few kids.

KID ONE

Yeah, I'm going to miss this place whenever they get rid of it.

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CONTINUED:

KID TWO

Yeah, me too. This place has a ton of memories.

KID ONE

Think, this is where a few of us met when we first moved here.

Looking dejected and growing sadder as they speak.

KID TWO

Sorry to break up the moment. But I have to get home before it starts getting dark.

Playfully pushing Kid One in the arm.

KID ONE

You guys coming? The sun is starting to go down.

ALL KIDS

(In unison)

We'll walk with you. Trevor, you coming?

Trevor, walking away and towards the obstacle course shakes his head.

TREVOR

No. I'm going to try a couple more moves. I won't be long. I'll see you guys at school tomorrow.

All continuing to walk to their exit and responding with various good byes to Trevor.

KID ONE

Be safe bro.

KID TWO

See you man.

KID THREE

Peace.

TREVOR

Alright, I'll see you guys.

Trevor waits a while to make sure they were gone. He then turns and walks towards where he saw Grace disappear.

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TREVOR

Lady! It's safe for you to come out now, they're gone. Come here girl.

Grace begins to appear from the shadows and walk over to Trevor. A little more trust shows in her walk and the posture that she uses to approach. And she has a confident happy wagging tail and backside.

Trevor walks towards her as well and they meet in the middle. He sits Indian style on the floor and she steps into his lap so he can hold and pet her.

ZOOM IN AS GRACE LOOKS UP AT HIM WITH HER BIG DARK EYES.

A look of content happiness comes over Trevor's face and he can't help but like her. Lady gives a couple of quite barks and out come five round rumbling tumbling puppies.

TREVOR

Whoa Lady! I didn't know you had puppies. They're all so cute. Like little mini versions of you.

Trevor sits on the ground and plays with the puppies for a little while. The puppies yipped and made puppy sounds, as Trevor endeavored to pet and play with each of them.

TREVOR

Hey lady, how or what are you eating? I assume you have to be starving. No telling how long you've been here. I wish I had something to give you right now, but I am sure chewing gum isn't going to help the situation.

Trevor gets up and dusts his shorts off. He contemplates what his options are as he doesn't want to leave Lady and her puppies in the warehouse.

TREVOR

I hate to leave you all here but I don't know what my parents would say. Maybe I can do something to keep you all together.

Trevor pauses as he thinks out loud. All the time while holding and stroking Cooper.