

Thor

Once upon a time in a town not far away there lived a big furry dog. This dog's life was a very happy one. He lived with a family that loved dogs; he always had lots of food to eat and big juicy bones on special occasions. The family named their dog Thor, because they wanted him to scare away burglars and be fierce. But Thor was a gentle and loving dog who spent most of his time running in his yard, where he was happy to chase squirrels or sleep in the shade. The people next door had a dog, too, named Critter. Critter had been a part of Thor's life for a long, long time. Each morning Thor looked forward to going to the fence and running up and down its length with Critter on the other side. They barked at each other, panted and whined together, and even sometimes were able to play in each other's yards. Critter was so much a part of Thor's life that it seemed natural that he would always be there at the fence waiting to greet him.

One morning when Thor ran to the fence as he usually did, something was different: Critter did not appear. Thor spent all day waiting and watching by the fence with a sadder and sadder look on his face. Still there was no Critter. Now Thor's owners understood that Critter had died, but they did not know how to make Thor understand what had happened. Finally they led Thor to the next yard to view Critter before he was buried. Thor sniffed and then began to whine; he knew then that Critter was gone.

But knowing didn't stop his pain. Thor got a pain in his heart that grew and grew. He refused to eat and stopped chasing squirrels. Every time he glanced at the fence Thor would be reminded that Critter was gone, and a big tear would roll from his eye. His owners tried to interest him in new toys, in walks or in fancy bones, but Thor would not be comforted.

One day as Thor glanced at the fence next door, feeling again his sorrow, a young puppy ran across the yard. Thor was horrified. How dare these people think that Critter could be replaced?? Determined that he would not pay any attention to the newcomer, he curled up in the shade of an old tree and fell into a deep and troubled sleep.

As Thor slept, Critter came in a special dream to talk to his heart.

"You are hurting because you miss me, and you miss me because you've been looking for me in the wrong place. Don't look for me on the outside; I'm here in your heart."

Listening to the words of his friend, Thor began to feel a fullness in his heart that he had never felt before, a fullness that hurt and felt good at the same time. And it was in this dream that Thor made his heart big enough for the two of them. After that, Critter and Thor talked for a long time in the way those who love each other talk.

When he awoke Thor stretched and yawned, and suddenly noticed the puppy staring longingly at him through the fence. As he looked back at the little dog, Thor noticed a new feeling growing inside him. He sat there, thinking again of his dream and letting its special

message be clear to his heart. Then, slowly, Thor walked across the yard. And with a special greeting that dogs can understand, Thor leaned through the fence and licked the furry head of the puppy.

"I once knew a dog named Critter," Thor told the puppy. And as he said this, he felt Critter smile.

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