

God has placed the question of eternity in our minds. What is the one thing children ask when their beloved pet passes away? Will my pet go to Heaven? *Scarlet's Garden: The Visit* is a heart-warming tale offering hope to readers and a fresh look at good overcoming evil, the power of forgiveness, and the abundant blessings resulting from waiting on God's perfect timing.

Scarlet's Garden: The Visit

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Scarlet's Garden

The Visit



Penny Taylor

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Chapter One

Whitney awoke to sunlight spilling through her window. “Yes! I’m finally here!” She kicked off the sheet and jumped out of bed. “I’ll be with Mamaw and Scarlet everyday for the whole summer!”

She put her bare feet on the tile floor and it felt nice and cool, not cold like it was where she and her parents had lived for the past year.

Whitney had spent all nine years of her life living next door to Mamaw and Scarlet until her parents, who were both doctors, had accepted jobs in another state last year. It was so good to be back to her warm, sunny home where flowers bloomed all year. Now she and Mamaw, and their ancient cat, Scarlet, could work in the rose garden or walk to the beach anytime they wanted. *Oh, how I’ve missed spending time with Mamaw and Scarlet!*

Next to Whitney’s parents, she loved Mamaw and Scarlet more than anyone in the world. Right then she wasn’t sure whom she’d missed more, Mamaw or the cat.

A grin split her face as she looked around her bedroom. Other than a short visit last Christmas, she’d been gone for a year, but all her things were where she’d left them. She grabbed her favorite picture of Scarlet off the nightstand and stared lovingly at the little cat’s face.

Scarlet was a small, dainty calico with streaks of gray, white, and yellow, and her pink-tipped nose matched the color of her toes. Born long before Whitney, she was very old, so old

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that she was a legend around town. Whitney and Scarlet had a close bond, and as the cat's wise, green eyes stared back at her from the picture, she seemed to know how happy Whitney was to be home. Whitney had never had her own pet and that made Scarlet extra special. In a way, Scarlet was her cat too.

Closing her eyes, Whitney took a deep breath and hugged the picture to her heart. She thought about how Scarlet always smelled like fresh-cut grass and clover. Tingling with excitement, she could hardly wait to step into the kitchen, scoop her up, and smell her hair for real. Carefully replacing the picture, she did a little dance, then ran to the window and threw open the shutters.

The birds were at the feeder and the colorful rose garden covered half the back yard. If there was anything better than the beach, it was the rose garden.

Along with roses there was an inviting butterfly garden. Her breath caught in her throat as a rainbow of butterflies danced from bloom to bloom. Two hummingbirds, not much larger than moths, caught her eye. They zipped between red, trumpet-shaped flowers, hovered and drank. Mamaw's back yard was better than the enchanted worlds in Whitney's favorite books. She sighed with joy.

Papaw, who'd passed away four years ago, had designed and planted the garden for Mamaw because Rose was both her name and favorite flower.

Whitney remembered two things most about Papaw: sitting beside him on the back porch watching fuzzy bumblebees bore holes in the eaves while he taught her about Jesus, and him showing her the proper way to chew on stems of grass and roll the flavor around on her tongue.

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The smell of roses tickled Whitney's nose. She inhaled so deeply her lungs hurt, held it as long as she could, then breathed out with a long swoosh. *I'm home at last!*

In front of the mirror she ran her fingers through her snarled, light blond hair. She looked a lot like Mamaw had at her age. Over the years Mamaw's curls had turned solid white but her fair skin was still smooth and they had the same upturned nose, sky-blue eyes and bright smile.

The most fun thing they had in common was considering themselves half Tomboy and half girly-girl. One day they might be giving each other a manicure or baking teacakes, and the next they might be fishing with cane poles and real worms while Scarlet napped in the sun.

Mamaw's real name was Rose Marie Christian. She and Papaw were retired missionaries. Mamaw was a well-known author of children's books about a missionary family who had terrific adventures in foreign lands that Whitney hoped to visit one day.

Mamaw's cottage was close enough to the beach to walk and Whitney wanted to go there today. She loved the salt breeze on her face and the way the squishy sand disappeared from underneath her feet each time a wave rolled in.

After breakfast she would ask Mamaw if they could take Scarlet for a walk on the beach and collect shells. If they were lucky they might even see some hermit crabs before the creatures scampered away, burying themselves in the sand.

Whitney gave up on the tangles in her hair and quickly changed into shorts and a pullover top. Not bothering with shoes, she darted from her room. But when she rounded the corner into the kitchen her smile faded. Something was wrong.

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The kitchen was silent and still. Mamaw wasn't at the counter, humming and sifting flour into the wooden bowl to make buttermilk biscuits as she usually was this time of morning. And Scarlet, who should be purring and rubbing herself against Mamaw's legs, was nowhere to be seen.

Whitney looked through the window. Mamaw was slumped in her favorite chair on the back porch. Her white curls were untidy and that wasn't like her at all. Eyes closed, hands folded beneath her chin, her face was lifted toward the sky. She was praying, but it wasn't her usual style. The strangest thing of all was that Scarlet wasn't there beside her, neither in her lap nor lying at her feet. The little cat wasn't on the porch at all. Not wanting to disturb Mamaw, Whitney stood still.

Mamaw opened her eyes and turned toward her. Tears stained her face, her nose red, her cheeks raw. She opened her arms wide. Whitney rushed to her and the old lady gathered her up. "Darling girl..."

"Mamaw?"

"I'm here."

"What's wrong?" Whitney asked, feeling like her world was tilting sideways. "And where's Scarlet?"

"Everything's going to be okay. The Lord is in control."

"Where's Scarlet?"

Mamaw looked at her tenderly, but didn't say anything.

"Mamaw... where's Scarlet?" Whitney's voice rose in panic and she frantically looked around. "Where is she? Where's our cat?"

Mamaw clutched Whitney's arms. Whitney pulled away and looked around. "Scarlet, where are you?"

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Mamaw hugged her close and Whitney sank against her chest. "Oh, darling girl... I don't know how to tell you this."

"It's about Scarlet, isn't it? Something happened to her. Is she sick? Is she at the vet's? Where is she?"

"She isn't here," Mamaw said. "Early this morning the angels came and took Scarlet to Heaven with them."

Whitney swallowed hard. She wet her dry lips. Her throat ached, and her chest felt like it did the time she got the breath knocked out of her by a basketball during a game last year. It had hurt so bad she'd had to sit out for the rest of the game and in the end her team had lost. Only this pain was worse than anything she'd ever known. She whispered the awful words. "Scarlet died?" Her ears were roaring so loudly she could barely hear her own voice.

"I'm afraid she did," Mamaw said weakly.

"Oh, no! No!"

Mamaw kissed the top of her head. "You know she was very, very old. The vet had been telling me for years it wouldn't be long. The Lord was good and let us keep her for a long time."

Tears spilled from Whitney's eyes. "It's not fair! She was my cat too! I didn't get to tell her how much I love her! I didn't even get to say good-bye!" She would never again rub her face against Scarlet's soft fur, listen to her purr, or feel her whiskers tickle her nose. "Do you think she knew I loved her?" Whitney's heart hurt so bad she couldn't wait for an answer. She buried her face in her hands and wept so hard her body shook.

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Hugging Whitney close, Mamaw tried to smile through her own tears. "Don't worry... she knew we all loved her, especially you."

Whitney pressed her face against Mamaw's shoulder and sobbed until her tears soaked all the way through the old lady's dress. Mamaw stroked her hair while they cried together. Whitney felt like her heart would never stop breaking. When she was finally able to wipe her face with her hands and sit up, she asked, "Mamaw?"

"Yes, my love?"

"I know you were trying to make me feel better when you said the angels came and took her to Heaven. That was your way of telling me she passed away."

"I thought it would be easier... saying it like that, I mean."

"Do animals really go to Heaven, or is it only a place for humans?"

Mamaw sighed. "God is the only one who knows for sure. That's where faith comes in. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

"But what does that mean?" Whitney asked.

"It means that God wants the best for all of us and that includes His creatures." Mamaw's face softened. "Animals are very special. God created them before He created man."

"She was the best cat anyone could ever have."

Mamaw nodded. "That, she was."

"I'll never forget her," Whitney said solemnly.

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“Neither will I. I truly believe she’s up there in Heaven, and that we’ll see her again when it’s time.”

Whitney looked up at Mamaw and their blue eyes met. "Mamaw, would it make you feel better to know for sure that Scarlet is in Heaven?"

The old lady smiled and her blue eyes sparkled for the first time that morning. "It sure would. It would be a blessing."

Whitney slipped her small hand into Mamaw’s.

Mamaw’s warm fingers wrapped around hers and squeezed.

They exchanged weak smiles. Whitney thought, *Then what’s stopping me from finding out?*

Jumbled thoughts swirled in her head and a seed of hope was planted. A plan took root and began to form. It sprouted, then shot up so fast she felt dizzy. Filled with purpose, she sat up straight.

For the first time since hearing the awful news, hope swelled in her chest and it stopped hurting to breathe. She vowed that she would do whatever she had to do to accomplish the plan. She didn’t know how, but she was somehow going to prove that animals go to Heaven!

Chapter Two

That afternoon Whitney tucked her library card into the pocket of her blue shorts and hurried to the little stucco library. She was determined to check out all the books she could find about animals going to Heaven.

She shaded her eyes in the bright sunlight. It was hot on her back and sticky sweat popped out all over. It felt gross, like she needed a bath, but getting to the library was more important. *I wish I'd put my hair in a ponytail and worn a ball cap*, she thought. Outside wouldn't be too bad if there was some wind, but not even a light breeze stirred the thick air.

The sidewalk was so hot it scorched her feet through her gel sandals, so she trotted on the grass instead. She did her best to suck in a deep breath, but it didn't work. *This must be what it feels like to try to breathe if someone were holding a pillow over my nose.*

She loved summertime, but today it was so blistering she thought she was going to pass out. By the time she spotted the library all she could think of was getting inside and cooling off in the air conditioning.

Sucking air, she headed toward the door. It swung open and she found herself face to face with Mamaw's next-door neighbor, old Mr. Richards, a stack of books tucked underneath his long arm. He was the creepiest person she'd ever met. She thought her day couldn't get any worse, but seeing him changed her mind.

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"Watch where you're going!" he snarled, glaring daggers at her. A tall, bony man, he was mostly knees and elbows. His arms and legs seemed always to be in motion, like tree branches waving every which way in the wind. Squinty eyes sank so far back underneath his low forehead that they were like barely visible buttons, making his beak of a nose look enormous. A thatch of reddish gray hair was combed to the side. A stinky odor, like he didn't use deodorant or bathe, followed him like a shadow.

"Excuse me, Mr. Richards," Whitney said, stepping aside so he could pass. Armpit sweat stained his tee shirt all the way down to his shorts. Her nose twitched at the smell and she wanted to clamp it shut, but knew that wouldn't be nice. She tried to hold her breath instead.

Muttering something rude about kids, he blustered down the steps. Everyone knew that he had no friends and didn't like children or animals. He especially hated Christians and made fun of them by calling them "holy rollers." Everything about him kept others at arm's length.

Even his yard was an eerie place that screamed *stay away!* Like something out of a scary movie, it was overgrown with vines and surrounded by a jungle of brier hedges that towered above the housetop. The roots of a huge old oak that had managed to survive decades of hurricanes had buckled the concrete driveway, and weeds grew through the cracks. Whitney had always thought if his yard was cleaned up the lower branches of the tree would be a good place for a rope swing, but she knew that would never happen.

She couldn't figure out why Mamaw bothered, but every Christmas she insisted they take Mr. Richards a plate of fresh-baked cookies covered up really pretty in red plastic wrap and a

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bow. He always accepted the cookies but closed his door in their faces without so much as a thank you. Whitney had never known a mean person before. *Mean... that's a good way to put it.* It was really the only way to put it.

Just then everything seemed to drop into slow motion. Mr. Richards's flip-flop snagged the concrete step and he stumbled. Whitney jumped backwards, eyes widening as his books went flying. His shoulders hunched forward, elbows bent, long arms flapping like giant wings as he double-stepped and then caught himself.

"Arrrr!" he bellowed, eyes flashing in anger. "See what you made me do!" He cocked an eyebrow. "If these books are damaged, you and your grandmother will pay the fine!"

Whitney ran to help him. "Don't worry, Mr. Richards. I'll get your books for you." Mamaw had always taught her to be kind to others, even to Mr. Richards. As mean as he was, she didn't feel like being nice, especially when she was so hot and in such a hurry.

"Well, make it quick. I don't have all day!"

She gathered the books as fast as she could. Stacking them neatly, she noticed the title of the first one. It was called *101 Facts About Poison*. She looked at the next title, and the next and finally the last one. They were all books about poisons! *Yuck!*

Warily, she looked up and their eyes met. He was watching her reading the titles. She hunkered down.

"What are you looking at?" he demanded. His squinty eyes narrowed to slits and he looked at her like she'd done something wrong.

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"Nothing," she answered in a strangled voice.

"You've got some nerve!" he growled in a low voice.

"Here are your books," she whispered, handing them to him.

He shook his finger at her. "You'll do well to mind your own business!" He leaned closer. "Do you hear me, girl?"

"Yes, Sir."

He snatched the books out of her arms with a snort and lumbered down the steps, disappearing around the corner.

Shaken, Whitney stayed on the steps until her breathing slowed to normal. *I wonder why he's so mad all the time*, she thought. What's more, she couldn't imagine anyone wanting to read books about poison. *He probably reads a lot because he has nothing else to do. He sure doesn't take care of his yard or spend any time making friends.*

Back to more important things, she opened the door and slipped into the library. As always, it was peaceful inside and so cool that her sweat practically turned to icicles.

Mrs. Beth Applebee, the librarian, smiled. "Hello, Whitney." Mrs. Applebee was a gray, busy woman with silver hair worn in tight curls. Muddy brown eyes crinkled over the top of thick glasses perched on the tip of her pointed nose. Her face always had a pinched look about it, probably from scanning books all day.

Even in summertime she wore skirts down to her ankles and flowery blouses buttoned up to her neck. She was always kind and helpful, but rushed. Although Whitney didn't think they were very much alike, she and Mamaw had been good friends from childhood and they attended the same church.

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Once a week Mrs. Applebee would come over and visit with Mamaw. They would drink iced tea under the ceiling fan on the back porch and talk about books while Scarlet dozed in Mamaw's lap.

A fresh lump formed in Whitney's throat. She couldn't think about never seeing Scarlet in Mamaw's lap again. If she did she'd start crying. "Hi, Mrs. Applebee," she managed to say.

"Hi Whitney. Let me know if you need help finding a book."

First Scarlet went to Heaven and then Mr. Richards acted like he wanted to bite her head off. This was the worst day of Whitney's life. Tears welled up in her eyes and she swallowed hard.

Taking a deep breath, she tried very hard to speak without crying. "I'm looking for books about animals going to Heaven. Do you have anything like that?"

"You want books about *what?*" Mrs. Applebee peered over the top of her glasses.

"Animals going to Heaven. I'm trying to find out if cats go to Heaven when they pass away."

Surprise and then sadness flickered across Mrs. Appleby's face. "Hmm... well, let's see. I don't believe we do. We have books on Heaven, and books on animals, but nothing about cats or other animals going to Heaven."

Whitney's heart sank. "Thanks anyway." She turned to leave. *That really stinks. I'll have to try the Internet.*

The librarian said, "What's the matter, Whitney? I hope nothing has happened to Scarlet!"

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Whitney's voice broke as she told her about the little cat passing away and how she was trying to find out whether animals go to Heaven.

Mrs. Applebee stopped what she was doing and listened. "Oh no!" she said, and looked at Whitney in despair. "That's so sad. Scarlet was such a wonderful cat, and so lovely. If I hadn't known how old she was I would have thought she was brand new. We'll all miss her terribly."

Whitney nodded. "She was the best cat ever."

"Is your Mamaw okay?"

Whitney shrugged. "She's really sad. And she thinks Scarlet's in Heaven, but she doesn't know for sure. That's why I'm trying to find out... so Mamaw will feel better... and so I'll feel better too."

"Don't give up, Whitney. Please try your best to find out."

"Scarlet has to be up there. It's the only thing that makes sense. Mamaw will be so happy to know for sure."

"So will I," Mrs. Applebee said softly.

"You will?" Whitney asked. "Why?"

Mrs. Applebee removed her glasses and blew her nose. She usually rattled on like she was in a big hurry, but not this time. She spoke softly and took her time. "When I was a little girl I had a magnificent, fluffy cat named Heidi. She was a Siamese and Himalayan mix, and she had the bluest eyes I've ever seen. Her face, legs and tail were dark gray and she was white everywhere else. Her hair was so thick it was like wool, but she never had a tangle. And she was huge, almost twice the size of Scarlet. I miss her so much."

Whitney drew in a breath. "She sounds *so* pretty."

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“She was.” Mrs. Applebee nodded. “Heidi used to stretch out beside me on my pillow at night and mew ever so softly. It was like she was telling me about her day and asking about mine.” She laughed. “It was just like having a real conversation. Like you and I are having right now, only we had our own way of talking. And we used to hold hands.” She giggled. “I taught her to put her paw in my hand and she would do it every night. Other than your Mamaw, Heidi was the best friend I’ve ever had.”

Whitney stood motionless as she listened.

Mrs. Applebee kept talking. “Sometimes when my head hits the pillow at night, I still see her face. It’s like she’s right there beside me, rubbing me with her cold, wet nose and telling me everything she’d done that day,” Mrs. Applebee said smiling. “There’s nothing in the world like being best friends with a cat.”

“What happened to her?”

“She got old and passed away. It was the saddest day of my life,” she sighed. “After that, I just about drove my mother crazy asking her whether cats go to Heaven. She always told me they did, but she was just trying to make me feel better. I still think about it and wonder whether Heidi is up there. Oh, how I miss having a cat to love.”

“Did you ever get another one?”

She shook her head. “No, my mother wouldn’t let me. I was so upset over Heidi that she said she’d never put any of us through that again.”

“What about later, after you grew up?”

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"At eighteen I went away to college and pets weren't allowed there. After graduation, I got married and my husband turned out to be allergic to animals of all kind, especially cats. Imagine my luck," she said with a laugh. "Marrying a man who was allergic to cats! He would start sneezing and his face would swell up at the sight of one." She clucked her tongue. "I thought about getting a cat after I became a widow, but I never did. Now I'm used to living alone."

Whitney understood why Mrs. Applebee was asking her not to give up. After all these years, she still wanted to know whether Heidi was in Heaven. "I won't give up, Mrs. Applebee. I'll find out if animals go to Heaven! I promise!"

"I don't have any books for you, but I do have a suggestion. Why don't you speak to Pastor Stan and Mrs. Joan? They know a lot about Heaven, and I know they like cats." Wistfully, she added, "I've often wanted to talk to them about the same thing, but I thought it would sound foolish coming from an old lady." Her face lit up. "But it won't sound silly coming from you. Oh, do go and ask them, and tell me what they say!"

"That's a great idea! I'll go there right now!" Whitney said with a grin. *Surely, Pastor Stan will know. With him being a preacher and all, I'll bet he knows everything there is about the Bible and Heaven and animals going there. If anyone does, he will!*

Eagerly, she turned to go, but Mrs. Applebee called out, "By the way, Whitney?"

"Yes, Mrs. Applebee?"

The librarian hesitated and, although there was no one within hearing distance, lowered her voice. Her muddy eyes bore into Whitney's blue ones. "Just a warning. Stay away from

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your neighbor, Mr. Richards. He was in here earlier and something's got him riled up. He's on the warpath."

Whitney gulped and the back of her neck tingled. With all the talk about cats and Heaven, she'd forgotten about him. "What do you mean?"

"A sad thing happened to him when he was just a little fellow and it changed him." She shook her head and clicked her tongue. "He's been mad at the world ever since, but today he was worst than usual." Her voice lowered even more. "I'm afraid he's up to something, and with you and your Mamaw right next door... well, I'm sure he wouldn't do anything to harm anyone, but better safe than sorry. Just keep your distance until he settles down."

"Don't worry, I won't go near him," Whitney promised.

Outside the sun was blazing so fiercely that she thought about going back into the library where it was cool, but she didn't want to waste any time hanging around and waiting.

Whitney ran all the way to the church and around back to Pastor Stan's office, then rang the bell and waited. She couldn't stop thinking about Mrs. Applebee's warning to stay away from Mr. Richards. She wondered whether it had anything to do with his checking out a pile of books about poison. *I'll bet he's up to no good. It's too bad the awful books weren't ruined when he dropped them!*

Despite the heat, goose bumps prickled her skin and she hoped she wouldn't run into him again anytime soon.

Pastor Stan opened the door. "Whitney!" He greeted her with his usual warm smile, but his eyes were sad. "Come in, come in." He stepped aside and held the door while Whitney

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entered the foyer, grateful for the air conditioning. "What brings you here?"

"I need to talk to you and Mrs. Joan about something," Whitney said.

"I see. Well then, come on in and have a seat."

They stepped into his office, a sunlit room with built-in shelves lined with books on three sides and French doors that opened to a garden with a fountain. It was prettier than she remembered, with the sun spilling in through the panes of glass and making butterscotch patches on the floor, while the air conditioning kept it nice and cool.

He said, "Joan and I were about to go see your grandmother to pay our respects and plan the memorial service. We know Scarlet's passing must be very hard on her. We'll all miss that little cat."

Pastor Stan's wife, Mrs. Joan, appeared and offered Whitney a glass of iced tea. Mrs. Joan was a plump woman with a round, pleasant face and kind eyes. Before Whitney had moved away, she'd been her Sunday school teacher.

Mrs. Joan said sadly, "We're so sorry about Scarlet. She was beautiful, and she carried herself like a princess. I know you and your grandmother loved her dearly."

Whitney nodded and gratefully took the drink. "Thank you." The iced tea felt good in her parched throat, but it did nothing to ease the ache she felt over Scarlet.

"Sit down and tell Joan and me what brings you here today," Pastor Stan said.

Whitney felt like she was the size of an ant when she settled herself on a leather sofa. It was so big that when she

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scooted back, her feet didn't reach the floor. Pastor Stan and Mrs. Joan sat across from her and waited.

She felt awkward and unsure of herself, despite having known them all her life. She had been in this very room with Mamaw more times than she could remember, and they were regular visitors at Mamaw's house. But this was the first time she'd ever paid them a visit on her own. Her stomach doing a flip-flop, she bit her bottom lip and felt even smaller. *Will they take me seriously or will they laugh? Will they tell me my imagination is running away with me? Will they have the answer I'm hoping for?*

Whitney looked at their expectant faces and took a deep breath. "Uh... what I want to know is... do animals go to Heaven? I figured you would know."

Pastor Stan sat without moving and for a dreadful instant she thought he wasn't going to answer her at all. Then he leaned forward and looked into her eyes. "You're asking a very big question. Not even King Solomon knew the answer."

That was the last thing she expected to hear, and her eyes widened. She remembered what she'd learned in Sunday school about King Solomon.

God had told King Solomon to ask for anything he wanted and it would be given to him. He answered God by asking for wisdom and knowledge.

"King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived!" Whitney exclaimed. "If he didn't know whether animals go to Heaven, then no one does."

Pastor Stan nodded. "King Solomon said that no one knows for sure."

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Mrs. Joan added brightly, "But there's good news. The scripture doesn't tell us whether animals *go* to Heaven, but it does tell us that there are animals *in* Heaven. For all we know, they may have once lived right here on earth and been someone's pets."

"What do you mean?" Whitney asked, brightening up. She tried to scoot closer to the edge of the sofa but her bare legs stuck to the leather and she had to wiggle her way forward. She leaned toward Mrs. Joan, hanging on every word.

"There are lots of places where the scriptures talk about animals in Heaven," Mrs. Joan explained. "We're told of white horses, horses of fire, and even herds of camels in Heaven."

Pastor Stan added, "The Bible tells us that one day humans and animals will live together in total harmony. It mentions wolves, lambs, leopards, goats, calves, lions, yearlings, cows, bears, cobras and vipers. They'll rest together, play together and even eat together."

Whitney was growing more excited. Her smile looked like the sun coming out from behind the clouds. "Leopards and lions are cats! They aren't the same kind Scarlet was, but they're cats!"

Mrs. Joan nodded. "Yes, they are."

"There are cats of all kinds there. I have a hunch your Scarlet is right up there with them."

Pastor Stan said, "There's even a talking eagle in Heaven."

"A talking eagle? Does that mean cats will talk in Heaven?" Whitney asked in awe.

He looked thoughtful. "In the Garden of Eden, Eve had a conversation with the serpent. There's nothing written that says

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she was surprised when he spoke. When all creation is renewed, the earth will be like the Garden of Eden."

"And there were plenty of animals in the Garden of Eden," Mrs. Joan added.

The pastor continued. "You see, Whitney, animals don't need a savior the same way humans do, but that doesn't mean there's no hope for them. God promises that He will renew all things."

"Does *all things* include animals?" she asked.

"That's the way I see it," he said.

"Not only animals, but all creation," Ms. Joan added. "Paul writes that creation awaits deliverance. That means the earth and everything on the earth, including animals."

He asked, "Does this help clear things up or are we making you even more confused?"

Whitney nodded so hard that her white-blond hair fell across her face and her blue eyes were filled with hope. "Yes, Sir, it helps. I mean, it's confusing, but it gives me a lot to think about."

"Joan and I will share something else with you," he said with a chuckle. "The scriptures aren't clear on whether animals go to Heaven, but personally, we believe they do."

"Mamaw and Mrs. Applebee are going to be happy to hear that, and so am I!"

Mrs. Joan explained, "We had a fluffy tortoiseshell cat once. She was so soft, and she had the prettiest face I've ever seen, except for Scarlet's, of course. Her name was Bacall. I loved her with all my heart and I still miss her."

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Pastor Stan said, "She was a big part of our family. When our kids were little, Bacall used to let them put dresses on her and ribbons in her tail and wheel her around in their doll stroller. She loved playing with them."

Mrs. Joan said, "She was the perfect cat for us. She was very sociable and friendly. Any time we had guests she always greeted them at the door. Everyone loved her. It was a sad day when she went to Heaven." She reached her plump hand into her pocket and pulled out a tissue. She wiped tears from the corners of her eyes.

It was weird, seeing someone as old as Mrs. Joan cry. She had to be at least *forty*! She'd seen Mamaw cry plenty of times, but that was different. Mamaw was *family*. But Whitney knew just how Mrs. Joan felt about her cat, and Whitney's heart went out to her.

Pastor Stan patted his wife's shoulder and she reached up and squeezed his hand. He looked at Whitney. "It's important to remember that faith, by its very nature, begins and ends in the realm of the unseen."

Whitney asked, "What do you mean?"

Mrs. Joan explained. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we don't see."

"That's the same thing Mamaw said," Whitney murmured. "But I'm still not sure I get it."

Mrs. Joan said, "In other words, faith toward the future is what we hope for, and faith toward invisible things is what we don't see."

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“But how do you know what you’re hoping for isn’t just wishful thinking? I mean, hoping for fairies or something silly like that wouldn’t make it true.”

“You make a good point, Whitney,” Pastor Stan said. “You have to put your faith in the things that line up with God's word. The scriptures aren't clear on whether animals go to Heaven, but we can be certain of God's love for us. Through His word we have the assurance that He’s in control.”

“When we don’t have the answer, sometimes it’s enough to know the One who knows all things,” Mrs. Joan said.

Whitney thought about that for a moment. “So faith is believing without having all the answers.”

“That’s the best way I’ve ever heard it put,” Mrs. Joan answered.

"Shall we pray?" Pastor Stan invited.

Silently, they bowed their heads.

Chapter Three

That night, Whitney awoke with a start and sat straight up in bed. She looked all around, wide-eyed and confused, but it was hard to see anything in the dark. She blinked hard and her breath came in ragged gasps. Mixed up and terribly frightened, she clutched the sheet tightly and worked it between her fingers.

Had it been a bad dream, or did something awful just happen? Was she still stuck in Mr. Richards' brier thicket, or was she safe in her room? She wasn't sure. "Oh!" she cried. "Where am I?"

Her mind swirled with memories of the awful nightmare....

A helpless cat was in big trouble in Mr. Richards' yard, and going through his brier patch was the only way in. If she didn't get to it first, he was going to do something terrible to the poor thing.

"Here, kitty, kitty," he'd coaxed, trying to trick the cat. "Here, kitty, kitty, kitty. I have something tasty for you...."

The angry cat howled in reply.

"The cat's smarter than you think," Whitney had whispered with satisfaction.

She couldn't see where she was going in the pitch dark, but she lunged ahead. Her hands were torn and bleeding from feeling her way through the horrible brier thicket.

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The thorns pierced her arms and scratched her face, and it hurt so bad she didn't think she could stand it. She hoped she wouldn't catch one in the eye, but she'd made up her mind not to think about that. *I'm not going to let a few stinking briars keep me from saving that cat!* Then something even worse happened.

Her head jerked back so hard, she was almost lifted off her feet. She skidded to a stand still and nearly fell backwards, wincing in fresh pain.

Someone or *something* had grabbed her hair from behind and was holding on tight. "Ouch!" she wailed, too mad to be scared. "Let me go!"

Kicking and failing her arms, she wasn't going to lose the fight! It couldn't be Mr. Richards; he was on the other side of the briars. *He must have an accomplice. Someone just as rotten as he is!* "Whoever you are, you are going to be sorry!" she yelled, giving a hard, backwards kick. But instead of her foot connecting solidly with flesh and bone, it zipped through nothingness, like a ghost was standing there. Then she reached up and felt the tangled, prickly mess.

It wasn't a bad guy after all. Her long hair had caught in the briars and wound around the growth so tightly that she couldn't move. "Ouch! Double ouch," she said, tugging on her hair. "This is going to be tricky."

And for the first time in her life she wished her hair was short as a boy's. "As soon as I get out of this scrape, I'm chopping it off," she vowed and gritted her teeth. "Who needs long hair, anyway?" she said, giving her knotted tendrils a yank.

In a flash, she wondered whether she could somehow use the sharp thorns to do the job, but even if she could get her

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bleeding fingers around one of the prickles it would take too long to saw through the matted snarls.

She grabbed her hair with both hands and wrenched as hard as she could. But the more she pulled, the worse her hair wound around the briars until the thorns had worked their way up and were sticking into her scalp. She was held fast to the spot while time was running out for the cat.

"Here kitty, kitty, kitty," Mr. Richards called, and Whitney could tell that he was gaining on the cat.

The cat's warning cry was louder and more desperate this time. It wailed, sounding like it knew something very bad was happening.

Whitney panicked and her heart thumped in her ears. *I have to get to the cat! If I don't, Mr. Richards will!* "Heavenly Father, help me!" she sobbed, forgetting all about her bleeding scalp and hands. "And help the cat!"

Suddenly she was awake and in her bed, sweating and shivering at the same time. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the dark, and the familiarity of her room sank in.

The framed photo of Scarlet was on the bedside table and she snatched it up, hugging it against her pounding heart. Touching the smooth glass over Scarlet's beautiful face made her feel better.

She rolled her neck in circles, just to make sure she could move her head. Then she inched her fingers through her tangles.

There were no briars holding her head in a grip, no cat in Mr. Richards' yard, and she wasn't trapped in his briar patch. It

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had been a dream after all. But it seemed so real that her face and hands still stung from the gouges.

I don't know if bad dreams come true, but one thing's for sure: if I ever do end up looking for a cat in his dreadful brier patch, I'm not going to be stuck by the hair of my head!

With that, Whitney sprang out of bed and sprinted toward the bathroom where Mamaw kept a pair of very sharp scissors.

At first light Whitney was very tired, but she got up anyway. Mamaw would need her help to get everything ready for Scarlet's memorial service

A kaleidoscope of flowers began arriving before noon, their sweet fragrance filling Mamaw's house with perfume. Workers from the church brought over extra chairs so there would be enough places for everyone to sit. Whitney had just finished helping drag them inside when Mrs. Applebee showed up with a blanket of pink roses for the top of the small white casket, and a wreath for the front door.

There were potted peace lilies, rose baskets, and vases of white irises and pink orchids. Scarlet's veterinarian sent something called a Celebration of Life Cross, made from lavender asters and pink roses and ivy, and Mamaw placed it next to the closed casket. They put the other arrangements beside framed photos of Scarlet.

Mamaw looked beautiful that day. She was wearing her favorite pink dress, and her white curls crowned her head like a halo. Whitney always thought Mamaw behaved like an angel, and today she looked like one.

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The night before, Mamaw had brightened when Whitney told her what Pastor Stan and Mrs. Joan had said about cats going to Heaven. Today, she seemed at peace.

There was a lump in Whitney's throat, but she had shed her tears for Scarlet. She understood that God was in control and He would do what was best for their beloved cat. His ways could be trusted. Her heart ached for their loss, but she was dry-eyed that afternoon when the mourners began arriving.

They came in cars, vans and pick-up trucks. A few showed up on motorcycles. Some even braved the heat and walked from their homes. There were so many vehicles that they had to park on the street in front of Mr. Richards' house. Whitney didn't recognize all the faces, but plenty were familiar.

Pastor Stan stood beside Mamaw and Whitney, and together they greeted the guests. Mrs. Joan played old-fashioned hymns on the piano. The mayor, who had cats of her own, was one of the first to arrive. With a sad smile she squeezed Mamaw's hand. "It was such a privilege knowing Scarlet. She had the sweetest nature about her."

Patting Mamaw's shoulder, Scarlet's veterinarian said, "She was the best patient I've ever had. Even when she was old and stiff with arthritis, she never complained."

A dozen women from Mamaw's church group hugged her and whispered soft words. Mrs. Applebee handed out glasses of chilled lemonade and kept dabbing her eyes with a tissue. Everyone signed the guest book.

The mourners focused on Mamaw when she moved to the back of the room and stood near the sealed casket. Her blue eyes shone and she spoke in a strong voice. "In one way, this is

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a day of celebration," she said. The peace on her face showed that she meant it.

Several people nodded and Whitney felt a little better knowing Mamaw was being so strong.

"The Lord spoke to me last night, and I want to share what He said."

The room became quiet as a tomb and only the sound of the ceiling fan broke the silence. Mamaw paused as the gathering leaned forward. "He said, 'You know how much you love Scarlet. Then know how much I, who created her, loves her.' That's when I knew everything was all right."

A shrill voice called out "Amen!" and Whitney jumped. She was sitting alone and staring hard at a flower arrangement to keep from crying, but it wasn't working.

The blooms looked just like Scarlet's face. The dark gray stripes that fanned out from her eyes to her jaw, even her long whiskers. The green leaves and stems were the color of her bright eyes. The ribbon was as pink as the bottom of her toes and the tip of her nose.

Whitney hung her head, glad that her hair was still long enough to hide her face. Hot tears poured from her eyes, dripped off her chin onto the front of her crisp, white dress. All she wanted to know was whether Scarlet was in Heaven. Then no one would have to be sad anymore.

Mamaw continued. "Then He said, 'Be still and know that I am God.' That was His way of reminding me that even in our darkest moments, He's still in control."

A second round of "Amen!"s followed.

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"Scarlet lived to be twenty-four years old. She was failing quickly and I knew yesterday would be her last morning on earth. God granted me the blessing of being with her when He took her. I picked her up and we went to her favorite place, the rose garden. I held her in my arms and she rested her head against my chest. When it was time I said, 'Lord, into your arms I commit her spirit.' And she closed her eyes and was gone. There was no greater blessing than having it happen as it did. And I want you, my friends and family." She paused and turned toward Whitney. "To join me in celebrating her life."

Mrs. Applebee blew her nose and applauded. With nods and smiles, the others wiped away their tears and joined in.

Whitney was the last one outside when it was time to bury Scarlet. She didn't want the others to see her crying and think she was just a silly kid, boohooing over her cat while everyone else was saying how Jesus spoke to Mamaw, and what a miracle it was that Scarlet lived to be twenty-four. But mostly it was because her heart was hurting so bad she didn't think she could stand it.

For all the talk about cats going to Heaven, she wasn't ready for Scarlet's body to be lowered into the ground and covered up with a pile of dirt. *The Bible says God won't give us more than we can handle, but I don't think I can handle this.*

Whitney squinted in the late-afternoon sun and leaned against the porch banister. It was the only thing holding her up. Her body was one big chunk of lead and her heart was even heavier.

It was all she could do to watch the others make their way to the spot in the rose garden where Scarlet's body would be laid to rest.

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She wanted to run screaming to the privacy of her room, throw herself into the middle of the comforter she'd left heaped on her bed and cry until she felt like stopping. She wanted to hug Scarlet one more time, press her face against her warm body, look into her eyes and tell her how much she loved her. She wanted to give Scarlet a piece of herself that the little cat could take to Heaven and keep forever.

Pastor Stan took the shovel and slammed it into the dry ground. Closing her eyes, Whitney turned away. *Why doesn't Scarlet come running to me right now, coat gleaming in the sun, feathery tail streaming behind her like a flag? How dare they put her in the ground!* Whitney felt like she might start screaming at any second.

Then Mamaw's arms were around her. "You don't have to go down to the rose garden if you don't want to. Scarlet would understand how hard it is for you. It's hard for me, too."

Whitney blinked in the sun. "I'll go. I want to say a proper good-bye." She used the collar of her dress to wipe her nose. After all the crying, the white fabric was grimy and wrinkled anyway. "But I have to get something first."

Whitney darted inside and ran to her room. She'd been so afraid after the bad dream last night that she'd gone into the bathroom and picked up the scissors, her mind made up that she would never be stuck in Mr. Richards' briar patch by the hair of her head.

Starting at the bottom she'd trimmed only a couple of inches before she'd come to her senses and stopped. She'd kept telling herself that it had only been a dream after all, and there was no reason to cut her hair short. Now she was glad she'd saved the trimmings.

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Inside her room, she ran to her dresser. The hair was still there, right where she'd left it. She stuffed it into her pocket and was back outside in a flash. Feeling stronger, she reached out and took Mamaw's hand in her own. Together they made their way to the grave.

After the burial Mamaw produced a pink bougainvillea and planted it on top of the grave. "It's the perfect plant," she said. "The thorns will keep the grave safe and the flowers are the color of the tip of Scarlet's nose and her toes. Before long, it'll be taller than Whitney's head."

Then, while everyone was hugging each other and saying what a lovely service it had been, Whitney knelt down and dug a little hole in the grave. She pulled the hair clippings out of her pocket and buried them beside the bougainvillea. She wanted to give something of herself to Scarlet, and her hair was the only thing she could think of. "Now, you'll always have part of me, Scarlet." She swiped at her tears with the back of her hand.

The sun was setting when Mamaw and Whitney stood on the front lawn and watched the last guest drive away. Mamaw broke the silence. "It's going to be hard getting used to not having our little cat around."

"I miss her so much," Whitney said, placing her arm around Mamaw's waist. "I'll think about her every day forever."

"So will I," Mamaw said, hugging Whitney to her.

They had just turned toward the front door when Mr. Richards suddenly appeared out of nowhere. "What's going on over here?" he asked crossly. "Did someone die?"

Whitney froze, looking at him in horror. He was the rudest person she had ever met! It was bad enough that she'd had a

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nightmare about him, but now here he was in person. Oh, how she wished he wasn't their neighbor!

Mamaw answered kindly, "As a matter of fact, someone did."

"Well?" he demanded. "Who was it? Anyone I know?"

He doesn't care who died! He's just being nosy! Whitney wished he would go away and never come back!

"Not likely," Mamaw said graciously. "But thank you for asking."

"Well, who was it?" he asked impatiently, looking very annoyed.

"I'm sorry to say it was a close family member. Our cat, Scarlet."

"Your cat?" he sputtered in disbelief. "All this ruckus over a cat? What sort of nonsense is that? Cats are nothing but trouble! And do you know what it costs to feed 'em?"

Mamaw answered brightly, "I'm quiet aware of what it costs to feed them, and it's money well spent. Have you ever thought about getting one of your own?"

"Ha! That'll be the day! It's hard enough getting rid of the ones that show up uninvited! Trouble, I say! Cats are nothing but trouble! They're harder to get rid of than rats! I'd rather have rats than a bunch of cats hanging around, looking for a hand out!" He stomped off toward his house, muttering to himself until he was out of sight.

"Poor man!" Mamaw said, watching him go. "He's missing out by not having a cat of his own."

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Whitney looked at her sideways. *How can she be so nice? Mr. Richards is the meanest and rudest person in the world. He doesn't deserve a cat of his own!* But his words gnawed at her and she felt nervous.

"What do you think he meant by 'getting rid of the ones that show up uninvited?'" Whitney asked.

"I don't know," Mamaw answered slowly. Her eyes crinkled like they always did when she was worried.

Whitney made up her mind to keep a close eye on Mr. Richards.

Chapter Four

The next morning Whitney knelt on a thick carpet of grass and placed a bouquet of Mamaw's best roses on Scarlet's grave. The sun was peeking over the horizon and the sweet scent of roses filled the summer air, but she felt so sad she thought her heart would break.

Whitney remembered how Scarlet loved to stroll between the trellises and stop and smell each bloom. She pictured the little cat walking along, holding her head high, swishing her tail and inspecting every rose as though it was up to her to look after them. She loved the way Scarlet would lift her head, close her eyes and sniff the fragrance.

It isn't fair. I can go to the garden and smell the roses anytime I want, but Scarlet can't and never will again. Smelling the roses just makes me want to cry.

Whitney tried to think about what Pastor Stan and Mrs. Joan said about animals going to Heaven, but it didn't help. Maybe if she had more evidence, real evidence, that Scarlet, Bacall and Heidi were up there, she would feel better. She was still determined to find out for sure whether animals go to Heaven, but she didn't know where to go from here. She had prayed about it with Mamaw last night and again this morning when she was alone in her room. *Pastor Stan, Mrs. Joan and Mrs. Applebee are taking us to breakfast later this morning. Maybe we can talk more about it then.*

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It always made her feel good when Mamaw included her in serious conversations. If she didn't learn anything new at breakfast, she would try the Internet.

Whitney missed Scarlet terribly. Her lips trembled and a tear was rolling down her cheek when she heard voices.

"Are we in the right place?" the girl asked.

"I can't tell," the boy grumbled. "You're in my way. I can't see where I'm going."

"I was here first!" the girl said.

"No, I was," he said.

"Just because you've been down here before doesn't mean you're in charge!" she said.

"Shhh, we don't want her to hear us," the boy said.

Whitney's head jerked up. Her mouth dropped open and her blue eyes widened. "Ohhh," she gasped in astonishment. She dug her fingers into the grass and stared, wondering whether she was seeing things.

Two children, dressed in white robe-like things, were right in front of her, hovering above the ground. Translucent wings fluttered behind their backs. They were walking—no, more like floating—downward. Whitney watched as they landed a few feet away.

The girl lost her balance and stumbled into the boy. "Get off me!" he said, nudging her aside. "Ouch! Now you're standing on my wing!"

"I am not!" she said. "My legs feel all rubbery. I don't know if I'm going to like it here."

"Trust me. You'll be fine."

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"This ground doesn't feel right," the girl said, hopping from one foot to the other. "And the grass prickles my feet. It feels all spongy and weird. You should've told me to wear shoes. I'll never get used to this!"

He rolled his eyes. "Quit complaining! We have a job to do."

"Would you look at that!" She shrieked in astonishment, pointing toward the butterflies fluttering on the blooms. "Are those tiny angels?"

The girl had long, golden hair, and a spray of freckles across her nose. The boy had light brown hair and eyes, and wore a serious expression. He was the younger of the two, but clearly the one in charge. "Of course not," he answered. "They're butterflies."

"They don't look right," she grumbled. "They're too small. And where are their bright colors? They don't look like the ones where we're from!"

"You just think that because this is your first time here. You'll get used to it. I've been here lots of times and I know what to expect."

"If you say so." Despite the grumpy expression, her green eyes danced as she twirled in a circle, looking all around. "This is sort of exciting."

Whitney sat frozen to the spot, too amazed to be frightened. She was holding her breath and her gaze was glued to the children. *Get yourself together, Whitney. This is going to be big!*

"She sees us!" the boy exclaimed.

"What are we going to do?" the girl asked with a gasp.

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"What we came here to do," he said, sternly.

"Okay, then. Here goes."

"Wait!" he hissed, but it was too late. The girl was already headed toward Whitney.

Whitney watched as the girl puffed out her chest and stumbled toward her. The girl lowered her voice, trying to sound very official. "Fear not!"

Whitney felt dizzy, but exhaled and found her voice. "Fear not?" she squeaked.

The boy threw the girl a look and stepped in front of her. "Let me do the talking," he said with a smile, trying to look friendly and less serious than the girl. "Hi. My name's Luke," he said. "This is Kimberly. We call her Kim for short." He gestured toward the girl and she grinned and waved. "Are you Whitney?"

Whitney didn't know what else to do, so she nodded, clutching the grass more tightly.

"Good," he said. "Then we're in the right place."

"What are you?" Whitney whispered.

He grinned. "We're angels."

Whitney's blue eyes bulged; then she bowed on the ground at their feet and pressed her face into the grass. She folded her hands together and began to worship.

"Don't do that!" they said together.

"Stand up, please," Luke said, patiently.

Her cheeks blushed bright red. *Oh, what have I done? No one has ever told me how to behave in front of angels!* Whitney

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somehow found her legs. She managed to stand but she was shaking.

"We aren't deities," Luke said. "Worship only God."

"We're God's messengers," Kim explained. "Your fellow servants."

Whitney licked her dry lips. "Where did you come from?"

"We dwell in the Heavenly realm," Kim said with a smile.

"That's where we receive our instructions from God," Luke said.

Whitney swallowed hard. "Instructions? What do you mean, instructions? Are you the angels who took Scarlet away?"

"Oh, no," Luke answered. "That was a different team."

"Well then, what do you want?" Whitney asked, not sure she wanted to know.

Luke looked amused and his eyes sparkled. "God sent us to tell you that your prayer has been answered."

"What prayer?" she croaked.

Luke and Kim locked eyes, knowingly. Kim muttered, "He told us she'd say that. He said they always say that." Sadly, with a shake of her head, she added, "Humans have such little faith."

"Shhh," Luke said, putting his finger to his lips. "Don't be rude, Kim. You'll hurt her feelings."

The angels turned back to Whitney. "The prayer about animals. You asked God to tell you whether they go to Heaven."

"How can this be?" Whitney asked. "I've prayed before and nothing like this has ever happened."

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Kim said, "Prayers are like missiles to Heaven. Our Father always answers them. Sometimes it's yes, sometimes it's no, and sometimes it's wait. But this is your day to be blessed. We're taking you to Heaven so you can see for yourself!"

Whitney paled and took a step backwards. "But I'm not ready to go to Heaven! I'm only nine years old," she said in panic. "I haven't even started fourth grade yet!"

Luke scowled at Kim. "I told you to let me do the talking!" He turned toward Whitney. "Don't worry. You aren't going there for good. It's only for a little visit."

"That's right," Kim agreed. "You're highly favored by God. This is very special treatment. Our Father doesn't take many humans to Heaven just for a visit."

Whitney's shoulders hunched and shame flowed through her. Bitter tears of horrible regret stung her eyes. "But I'm not worthy," she uttered in despair. "Just yesterday I was having some really rotten thoughts about Mr. Richards. I knew it was wrong, but it felt so good. Now I'm sorry!"

Luke's face softened and his light brown eyes tenderly reassured her. He looked more like an angel than a little boy and Whitney thought she had never seen such a lovely child. He said, "It isn't about being worthy. Our Father's word says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He chooses whom He will bless, and He has chosen you."

Whitney sighed in deep relief and felt very humble. "Well, that's different," she sniffled.

Luke smiled brightly. His front teeth had a small space in between them where they hadn't come together yet. "We thought you'd see it that way."

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A feeling of wonder grew inside Whitney. She tingled from her head to her toes. She looked at Luke curiously. "You said your name is Luke. I always thought Luke was much older."

He frowned, puzzled. Then a look of understanding crossed his face. His laugh sounded like music. "I'm not *that* Luke. You have me confused with Luke of the New Testament. He was a disciple. I'm an angel."

Kim giggled. "Humans don't become angels when they go to Heaven. They just get new bodies. And they don't have wings."

Whitney was in awe. She hoped with all of her heart, that this wasn't a dream. And if it was a dream, at least it was better than the one about being stuck in Mr. Richards' briar patch. "Will I get a new body when I visit Heaven?"

"You won't get your new body until you're there for good," Luke said. "Besides, you won't be thinking about that during your visit."

Kim added, "Everything there is *so* much better than what you're used to! You don't even have to wear shoes because you're always standing on holy ground. It's so beautiful, so bright! There's no sun, but it's never dark and never night."

Whitney was confused. "How can it be so bright if there's no sun? And what do you mean about it never being night?" *If there is no night, there are no nightmares about Mr. Richards. This is sounding better and better.*

Kim giggled, and Whitney noticed that she did that a lot. But it wasn't the sort of laugh that made her feel like she was being poked fun at; it was the kind that made her want to join in.

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"God is Light, so there's no need for the sun," Kim explained. "With Him there can never be darkness. We can't wait to show you around!"

Whitney was bouncing with excitement. "I have a feeling I'm going to learn a lot from you two!" She was no longer surprised the angels were visiting. She remembered Pastor Stan's words. *Faith, by its very nature, begins and ends in the spiritual realm.* Something very spiritual was going on and she was delighted to be part of it.

"How far away is Heaven? I need to be back soon because Mamaw will be looking for me. She needs me now that Scarlet's gone, and I don't want to worry her and make her feel worse. Besides, her friends are taking us to breakfast and I can't be late."

"It's much closer than you think." Kim winked. "You'll see. Ready?"

"I'm a child of God and will go where He sends me. I'm ready," Whitney answered and squeezed her eyes tightly closed.

God has placed the question of eternity in our minds. What is the one thing children ask when their beloved pet passes away? Will my pet go to Heaven? *Scarlet's Garden: The Visit* is a heart-warming tale offering hope to readers and a fresh look at good overcoming evil, the power of forgiveness, and the abundant blessings resulting from waiting on God's perfect timing.

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