

The Lost Lamb

By Gretchen Keith

A chapter from the book of stories about heaven, *The Life to Come*

Joshua sobbed as he ran to his favorite tree. He climbed into the branches with ease. No one would find him here, and he wanted to be alone for a while. His problem was his pet lamb. That morning the lamb had followed him around the garden and joined him in play. But now his lamb was gone!

Joshua peered up at the sun through the tree branches. He was just a little boy in heaven, but already he knew to look for the Lord in the heavenly Sun. "Father in Heaven, please help me find my lamb!" He looked down from the tree to see if his lamb had suddenly appeared. No lamb. But soon Joshua found himself thinking about how the day had gone.

In the morning he had awakened to the birds singing a cheery hello. After breakfast, he straightened his room and took care of his garden. There was a weed trying to grow, but the boy yanked it from the ground. "No weeds are allowed in this garden!" he said sternly. He smiled at the flowers sparkling like jewels in the sunshine of heaven. Then Joshua saw a new flower. He called to his angel mother, "Mama! Come see the new flower in my garden!"

Mama came to see the flower. It was a purple rose with silver leaves. "It is lovely, Joshua," she said. "The Lord is pleased with you, isn't He?" Joshua nodded happily. His two brothers came to see the new flower, too.

Then Mama took the three little boys to her garden for morning worship. First they prayed to the Lord. Mama read them a story from the Word, and they made pictures of the story. Then they sang happy songs about the Lord.

After worship the boys played together. Sometimes they painted pictures, looked at books, or played with toy lions and horses. Today Joshua and his brothers used small wooden figures to act out the Easter story.

At lunch time, Joshua helped Mama uncover the dishes that appeared on the table. He enjoyed being helpful, and he was eager to see what they were having to eat. Lunch was a wonderful stew, buttered biscuits, fruit salad, and pudding. After eating, the boys went outside so that Mama and her husband could visit. Joshua sat down by a clump of yellow flowers, and he started to count them. Suddenly a white bundle of wool landed in his lap. It was his lamb. "I wondered when you would come!" The little lamb nuzzled the boy's hand. Joshua said, "I love you, too." He hugged the lamb and stroked its soft fleece.

"Joshua!" called his brothers. "Come on! Let's play!" Joshua jumped up. The boys went to pick apples in Mama's garden, and the lamb followed. They played hide and seek in a grove of trees, and the lamb stayed by Joshua. They ran to the pond to watch white swans glide on the water, and the lamb came along. The lamb followed wherever they went.

“Boys,” called Mama. “It’s time to go to the park!”

Joshua said to his lamb, “I’ll be back soon. I’ll meet you in my garden.”

Mama and the boys walked to the park, and the lamb stayed behind. Joshua reached the park gate first, and the flowers near it shone brightly as he entered. The little boy looked around for his friends. Paths wove through flowering laurels, inviting children to explore their turning ways. Gentle deer stood quietly in the woods, willing to be petted. A fountain spouted in the center of the park, and there Joshua saw his friends splashing in the clear water. But before he joined them, Joshua asked Mama to make him a garland. She made a garland of such brilliant flowers that Joshua seemed to be wearing a rainbow! Then he ran off to play with his friends. They dabbled in the fountain, then explored the woodland paths and played several games.

When Mama called the boys to come home, Joshua was in the middle of a game with his friends. It was his turn to be the leader, and he didn’t want to leave. Joshua said, “I don’t want to go home now,” but no one heard him except his friend, Christopher.

“Cheer up!” said Christopher. “We’ll play again tomorrow, and you can be the leader first.” But his kind words did not help Joshua.

“I want to be the leader now!” Joshua said. “It’s not fair!” And the more he thought about it, the angrier he became. Joshua saw one of the deer, and, without thinking, he picked up a stone and threw it at the deer. The frightened animal darted away into the woods. But Mama didn’t see Joshua throw the stone, for she was already walking home.

Joshua followed Mama and his brothers, but he felt stormy inside. When Joshua got home, he ran to the garden to meet his lamb. But the lamb wasn’t there. And the flowers looked sad, hanging their heads as he walked by. Where could his lamb be? He looked near the pond, but the lamb wasn’t there. He walked through the meadow but found only the grass and the meadow flowers. His lamb was nowhere to be found!

That was why Joshua had climbed into his favorite tree, crying until he could hardly breathe. He was calmer now, but he still didn’t know how to find his lamb. The day had been a fine one until the end. Why was his lamb gone? Joshua looked toward the sun again, and he knew what to do. He climbed down from the tree and ran to the house.

“Mama, I have to talk with you.” Mama was reading a story to his brothers, but she put the book aside when she saw Joshua’s tear-stained face. She took him outdoors to her garden.

“What is it, dear?” she asked him.

“My lamb is missing! I looked everywhere, but he’s gone!”

“Joshua,” Mama reminded him in her gentle way, “your lamb can’t be with you when you’ve done something bad. Did you do something wrong today?”

Then Joshua remembered what had happened when it was time to leave the park. Suddenly he knew why his lamb was missing. At first he felt too embarrassed to tell Mama, but she smiled encouragingly at him, and the words came tumbling out.

“I was angry with you in the park. It was my turn to be leader, and I didn’t want to leave, so I threw a stone at a deer.” Then he started crying again, and Mama gathered him into her lap.

“Do you know who sent you all those angry feelings, Joshua? The evil spirits. They like it when people are angry, and they try to make people hurt others in their anger.”

“Then they were happy when I threw a stone at the deer?” asked Joshua.

“Yes,” Mama answered. “And your anger has kept your lamb away, too.”

“Should I never be angry?” asked Joshua.

“No, that would be too hard,” said Mama, smiling kindly. “We all feel angry sometimes. But we shouldn’t hurt anyone in our anger.”

“Okay, I’ll try not to,” said Joshua. He gave Mama a hug and a kiss. He felt much better inside. Something soft touched his hand, and he looked down to see his lamb! Joshua laughed with delight, and the lamb seemed to smile. “Thank you, Lord, for bringing back my lamb!” said Joshua. “And I’m sorry that I hurt your deer. I’ll try to be better!” Then the boy and his lamb played until supper. Joshua was happy, his lamb was happy, and even the flowers seemed happy once again.

Depart from evil, and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it (Psalm 34:14).