

A golden retriever dog is positioned in the upper half of the frame, looking directly at the camera with a calm expression. Below it, a white cat with striking green eyes is also looking forward. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light beige color.

WHEN GOD SENDS ANIMALS
TO COMFORT US

*Angels in
Disguise*

PHYLLIS HOBE

ANGELS IN DISGUISE

WHEN GOD SENDS
ANIMALS TO COMFORT US

EDITED BY PHYLLIS HOBE

A GUIDEPOSTS BOOK

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Barney's Gift

Lynn Seely

Sarah looked out her kitchen window and sighed. Last night's snow lay in foot-deep marshmallow drifts. To some it was beautiful; to Sarah snow was a hardship. Now the front steps and cement sidewalk would need attention.

Today was Christmas. Sarah saw it merely as one more bleak and lonely winter day. No Christmas tree peeked out the front window. No light winked a cheery greeting and no gaily wrapped presents were to be found in her home.

Her home had once housed a tumble of children and noise, but today it was silent, a stark reminder of what was no more. She had been a widow for many years, yet not one day passed without her missing him—and her only children, a son and daughter, were grown and lived far away. She was expecting a call from her daughter later that day. It would be nice to hear her voice and she would have a chance to thank her for the thoughtful gift, a much-needed check.

Sarah's son was in the navy. He had been away for months and was unable to call or send a gift. She had no idea when she would hear from him again. Perhaps he would be able to call her today, perhaps not. She had to admit that being so alone was difficult at times. Other than the phone call, there was no reason to expect today would be any different from any other. Yet it would be.

Sarah was not as steady on her feet as she used to be and during the winter she worried about slipping on ice and falling. She tried to be careful and always made sure to sprinkle salt on her front steps when they needed it. Once the salt had melted through to the cement, she would make her way down and take care of the sidewalk. No longer able to manage a snow shovel, she used a sturdy broom to sweep or push the snow off a narrow path to her mailbox. She had done so only three days ago, yet it would have to be done again. For a moment she considered waiting a few days before she undertook the task, especially since no mail would be coming today, but decided against it. If it snowed again tonight, it would be too deep for her to deal with.

Sarah grasped the small can filled with salt and headed for the front door. She winced—arthritis pain made even this simple chore difficult. Occasionally the pain seemed more than she could tolerate, yet this morning it was the ache of loneliness that caused her the most distress.

She opened the front door slightly and tossed salt on the top step. Within seconds she heard the familiar, faint crackle that indicated the salt was beginning to change ice and snow to slush.

Gingerly she eased her way outside. She reached into the can for another handful of salt to toss and in doing so lost her balance. Down she tumbled. She hit hard and the next