

IN THE BEGINNING

Book 1: *Heavenly Daze* Series

by

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Chapter 1

Homer frowned. With his toe, he pushed at a corner of the puffy cloud where he stood. He watched it move in slow motion back into its original shape. His frown got bigger. He checked to see if anyone was watching. When he was sure he was alone, he picked up a large chunk of snow-white cloud and tossed it away from its base, kicked it high in the air. As his toe met the mass, it shattered into a hundred fragments. Fragments that slowly floated down, one by one, and were reabsorbed wherever they landed.

Homer, Heaven's newest angel, was bored.

He wondered, as he often did, how long he would have to remain in his present work assignment. To him being a feather paster was the most unexciting assignment in the Heavenly realm. Even if it was part of the celestial clothiers where the best angelic accessories were fashioned. Oh, there was nothing wrong with old Lucius, his teacher and the supervisor of the department. But Homer couldn't get excited about pasting feathers onto angel wings. Especially since there were more than fifty styles available to the Heavenly Host.

After all, angels were in Heaven to be assigned to newly arrived humans. Humans whose time on earth was over, but whose eternal lives were about to begin.

Last week Homer finally became eligible to be assigned to a human. It had been six whole actons, in angelic time, but there was Homer -- still trying to artistically arrange feathers with his stubby fingers. He got more feathers in his red curly hair and on his freckled face than he did on the wing frames.

Homer sighed. Waiting was so hard!

Chapter 2

Suddenly trumpets blared. Behind the towering cloudbank on his right, Homer heard the sounds of other music and a great heavenly chorus. Hundreds, then thousands, of angelic voices echoed in praise. Excitement flared inside of him.

The procession. He hadn't realized how late it had gotten. It was time for the newest group of humans who'd arrived in Heaven to be escorted to their assigned mansions. The Lord Himself would walk with them part of the way. The new people would be called 'saints' after today.

Homer felt a glow of love so intense it shook his short, plump body. The Lord Himself would be pass by. Homer hadn't seen Him for a long time...at least it seemed a long time.

He quickly trotted across the fluffy cloudbank and around a cumulus cloud corner, straining eagerly forward as the sound of voices and musical instruments grew louder and louder.

His body quivered with excitement when he saw a huge crowd. The heavenly host and the resident saints were gathered along the main street. The procession sounded very close.

Homer finally reached the street. He wriggled and inched his way forward between the knees of the taller saints and angels so he would end up at the very front of the crowd.

Now the noise became deafening. Shouts of "Glory" -- "Hosanna" -- "Hallelujah" could be heard on every side. A golden radiance could be seen -- visible and intense above the crowd.

From his place behind the right kneecap of a very tall angel, Homer's heart beat fast. Perhaps this time he would be called to join the procession of newly arrived saints, their assigned

angels, and the Lord. They would all walk together to the mansions the Lord had prepared and in which the new saints would dwell forever.

The radiance grew. The shouts increased and rose until the praises formed a halo of light above the crowd.

Homer tried to squirm around his big friend Festus, but couldn't quite squeeze past the other angel's large kneecap. Homer finally stopped his struggling match and froze. The Lord was passing by.

The radiance felt overwhelming. Homer stood entranced, a warm wave of love pulsing from the very center of his being toward his King, and toward all the occupants of Heaven. The emotion lasted until finally the radiance passed and the crowd turned as one to watch the end of the procession.

Festus' huge kneecap also pivoted. Homer saw his chance. He slipped by to at last stand on the front row of the crowd of saints and angels. The procession had almost reached the corner.

He ducked his head. So he wasn't going to be chosen...again.

A voice sounded softly. "Homer."

He looked around. There wasn't anyone next to him...yet...he thought he had heard someone speak right beside him.

"Homer." The voice repeated his name.

Homer stiffened. He knew that voice.

"Yes, Lord." His voice squeaked in his eagerness.

"Homer, join the procession. I have an assignment for you."

Chapter 3

"Yes, Lord," Homer shouted, now filled with joy. He darted away from the crowd and ran with all his short might to catch up. He happily skipped, ran, and jumped along with the last row of other angels so he could keep pace. Since he was so small it was hard for him to walk with the slow dignity of the others. Since his energy made up for his lack of size, he managed to keep up with the rest.

The procession grew smaller the further they walked. Angels and newly arrived saints dropped out of line to stop at the streets where the new arrivals' Heavenly mansions were located.

He wondered which street they would be on. Maybe they'd be assigned to one of the mansions on Cloudbank Street. They were the most beautiful of all, at least in Homer's opinion. The back of the mansions gave a view of acres and acres of cloud formations. Formations that billowed and curled and curved into hundreds of fantastic shapes.

Sometimes the clouds looked soft and fleecy -- other times they showed sharp edges with jagged patterns that held many shades of blues, grays and purples. Homer never tired of watching the clouds change shape and color from moment to moment.

The assignments were almost complete. There remained only a small group of three or four. Lo and behold, sure enough...they were heading for Cloudbank Street.

"Hallelujah!" Homer shouted. The others in the group turned, looked down, and smiled at the enthusiasm of the youngest angel.

"Homer".

It was Archibald, tall, balding, dignified Chief Angel for Mansion Assignments. He looked solemn at Homer's youthful outburst of enthusiasm.

"Homer." He peered downward through his gold-rimmed spectacles. "Here is your assignment. This is saint Amanda Johnson, just arrived today from Earth. From this day forward, she is in your charge. After the interior of her mansion is finished, be sure to leave all of the proper forms and papers with my office. Be at peace!"

With that, Archibald and the others walked on. They left Homer and a tiny white-haired lady, barely a head taller than Homer, standing in front of the most beautiful mansion of all.

Homer peeped upward from under his eyelashes. His very own saint. How could he best serve her? What would make her happy? "How do you do?" His whisper was barely heard.

"Hello, Homer," a soft, gentle voice replied. "I'm so happy to be here. I can hardly believe it. It seemed as though this day would never come...and yet...here I am. Home with the Lord. Oh, Homer, isn't He glorious? More glorious than I ever imagined. I wondered all my earthly life what it would be like...seeing Him face to face...but I could never really..."

Homer, now looking up more boldly, saw a sweet smile of remembrance on her lips and a glow on her face. The reflected glory of the Lord's presence still lingered around them.

How Homer loved to see that look on the faces of the saints. How they loved the Lord. His heart stirred with the beginnings of his feelings for this little lady saint. He knew he would love her. He could already tell.

Chapter 4

Homer suddenly remembered his angelic duties. His saint was standing outside of her mansion. They must go in. He should be about the business of introducing her to her heavenly home.

He cleared his throat. "Ahem. Ma'am, uh, Mrs. Amanda," he said. "Forgive me for not escorting you inside right away." He glanced at the sheaf of papers Archibald had thrust into his hand a few minutes before.

"Let's see, you're assigned to Suite 402-A in the Jewel Wing." He grinned. "Oh, boy. That's the best ever!" He suddenly realized he was not getting any response from Amanda.

She still stood, a soft smile on her lips, and gazed back down the processional pathway. The radiance of the Lord's passage still lingered at the fluffy edges of the street.

"Mrs. Amanda!" he tugged at her sleeve. "Mrs. Amanda, come on inside. We have to get your rooms ready."

Amanda's eyes refocused as Homer tugged again on her white linen garment. "Oh, yes, my room." She cast a last lingering look down the path. "Certainly, Homer, my room. Now, just where is that?" Amanda had to tilt her head back to get a complete look at the tall building.

"Surely they aren't going to put such a humble person as me in a place like that," she said. "Are you *sure* this is where I'm supposed to live, Homer? Somehow it seems too grand for an ordinary person like me."

"It's yours all right." Homer studied the papers again. "Archibald never makes mistakes about mansion assignments. Come on, let's go in and get you settled."

He took her by the hand and led her into the entrance of the huge building.

"Oh-h-h," she crooned as she saw the magnificent decorations inside. "Oh, Homer, this is so beautiful! Are you *sure* there isn't a mistake? Isn't there perhaps a plainer building where I'm supposed to have a room?"

"Now, Mrs. Amanda," Homer took her by the hand and led her toward an elevator door, "don't you remember what the Lord said in the Bible about there being many mansions in His Father's house? You don't think a plain little building would be a mansion, do you?"

"It's so wonderful," murmured Amanda.

The door silently slid shut and immediately re-opened.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Did we get on the wrong elevator?"

"No," replied Homer. "We're there."

"But...but... that was so fast." Amanda placed one hand over her heart. "Is everything in Heaven that amazing?"

"Just about." Homer swaggered a little. Maybe this role as coach, guide-about-Heaven and assigned saint-helper wasn't so bad. "You'll see some things are more amazing than that."

They stopped before a door marked 402-A.

"This is it." Homer waved toward the entrance. "Your apartment."

"An apartment," said Amanda. "I just expected one room. You mean there's a whole apartment just for me?"

"Well, it's sort of like that." Homer ducked his head so he didn't have to look her in the eyes. "It's not exactly what you mean on Earth when you say an apartment. After all, this is Heaven."

He turned the knob and shoved open the door.

Chapter 5

Amanda gasped.

Stretched before them was limitless space. Billowing cloudbanks gave the illusion of a floor. Hazy white mist looked like walls. Overhead there was no closed-in ceiling, no limited view, but instead high, glowing clouds that arched into forever.

Throughout, and over the entire scene, a glorious purple radiance pulsed. Purple splashed with dashes of gold and pink and crimson. Heavenly glory that made the most gorgeous sunset on earth look dull.

Amanda stood still, obviously dazed. Homer knew she had never seen or imagined such glorious colors. Such unlimited space. Such everything. Never, in her wildest imaginings, would she have pictured Heaven as being like this.

"I, uh, could I sit down somewhere?" She reached toward Homer as though dizzy.

"Well," Homer said. "You *could* pull up a cloud". He stooped down and scraped up enough fluffy white cloud to make a comfortable-looking stool, then plopped down on it.

The stool sagged slightly to accommodate his weight, then nestled around him like the hug of an old friend.

Homer showed off, leaning back, then bouncing, on his improvised cloud-stool.

Amanda's mouth dropped open.

Homer finally took pity on her surprise. He stood up. The stool slowly dissolved back into the cloud base.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Amanda", he said. "I shouldn't tease you. You must be trying to get used to being here instead of on Earth. I know it must be very different."

"Very." She rubbed her forehead.

"Look," Homer said. "We *are* in Heaven. You'll soon get used to things. Why, before another acton goes by you'll be an old hand around here."

"Well," Amanda trembled out a smile. "Well, then, you're right! This *is* Heaven...and I mustn't be surprised at anything that happens. All right, Homer. You're the angel. What do we do next? Is this it? Do I push the clouds together to make furniture, or what?"

Homer gazed at her, gave her a delighted look.

She looked back at him with a loving expression on her face. Perhaps she was beginning to love him. Her very own angel.

"Actually, Mrs. Amanda," he said. "What you see here is just the foundation, so to speak. Your mansion, and every saint's who comes here, is exactly that. It's your mansion."

Puzzlement sat on Amanda's face.

Homer waved a hand around. "We're going to create whatever pleases you. Whatever place you ever wanted to live on Earth, you can have it now. You can have an enormous mansion, a skyscraper, or a little vine-covered cottage. Whatever pleases you most.

"We can put it in the woods or on a mountain or beside a creek or on an island. Anywhere you can imagine. We can even put it in outer space – but it's usually more fun to just take trips there as a sightseer or on a vacation.

"We can do anything. You see, when He left Earth, the Lord said that He went to prepare a place for you. For all the saints." He shrugged. "Everybody thought He'd make something like a giant hotel...or a bunch of marble buildings covered with gold and silver and precious stones.

“They thought that would be where all the saints would live throughout eternity. But that was just *their* idea. Of course, if you want to live in a place like that, you can. But what the Lord did was to fix all the atoms and molecules and stuff so when the saints got here they had a place prepared for them to live their fondest dreams.

“Your place in heaven is designed to make you happy forever. He could have had it all in place, of course, but He did it this way so that you could have the fun of fixing everything yourself. Sort of like choosing your own house and furniture on Earth.

“So...what's your pleasure, ma'am?" he asked. "A three-room cottage? Or the Los Angeles Hilton Hotel?"

"Homer," Amanda put a hand to her head. "Make me one of those cloud stools, will you? I think I need to sit down."

Chapter 6

Homer quickly pushed and pulled puffs of unresisting cloud into a comfortable chair shape complete with a wide back, broad arms, and even a big footstool.

Amanda sank into the cloud recliner. She appeared overwhelmed by the things she had heard and seen. Homer suspected her poor head was whirling. In fact, she acted so dazed she didn't seem to realize she was sitting on a cloud chair.

After a few moments of silence, Amanda spoke. "Homer," she said. "On Earth, I lived what they thought of as a very long time. I'm 92 Earth years old. And I have seen many things during those years.

"I've seen little towns grow into great cities. I've seen people riding behind horses in buggies and people fly to other planets. I've seen homes lighted by candles and I've seen laser beams perform surgery.

"So many changes, Homer, that at times it almost made my poor head spin at the wonders that were accomplished just in my lifetime. I had several different kinds of homes during those 92 years.

"But, you know, Homer, what I always *really* wanted and never had? What I used to dream about those Earth days when life was hard and things were difficult?"

"What?" asked Homer, on tiptoe with eagerness.

"I always wanted a little log cabin, somewhere in the woods with lots of trees and birds and animals around. Somewhere I could smell the flowers and hear the birds and just rest.

“I used to think about that little cabin sometimes when I needed to quiet my mind. I always used to say, "Lord, I don't want anything fancy when I get to Heaven. Just give me that little log cabin and the trees and birds and the time to rest and enjoy them.

“So I guess that's what I'd really like, Homer. Can we do that?" Amanda's eyes were big and serious as she looked at him.

"No problem-o!" Homer swelled out his chest. "That's almost too easy, Mrs. Amanda. How about if we fix it right now? I'll turn in all the forms to Archibald later.”

"Wonderful!"

He saw Amanda's eyes began to shine.

She sprang up from her cloud chair which immediately began to dissolve. "Where do we start?"

"It's easy!" Homer said. "You just say what you want...and it happens. First, tell me where you want the cabin.”

"All right, Homer," Amanda said, "here's what I always wanted.” She described a beautiful place in the woods.

He could tell it was a picture she had carried in her heart for a long time.

Her eyes grew soft as she spoke.

Homer nodded encouragement.

Before their eyes, trees began to form. The soft cloudbank in front of them grew solid and turned into green grass carpeted with moss. Wildflowers and ferns tucked themselves around the bases of the trees. Stately pine trees, graceful birches, mighty oaks...many of the kinds of trees that had been on Earth. They appeared one by one, branches waving gently in a soft breeze.

Amanda continued to talk. Some narrow woods came into being.

Homer nodded approval as he scribbled busily on his papers.

Now he heard the sound of birds...all the varieties noted for their bright colors and sweet songs. Birds, also not bound by the limitations of Earth any longer, but birds free to fly the skies of Heaven. Then came animals -- gentle fawns, a mighty stag, a snorting mare and her shy colts, frolicking woolly lambs.

And last, a magnificent collie, a majestic dog, which came forward and laid his head on Amanda's knee.

Chapter 7

Homer could hardly write fast enough to keep up. He had never seen anything like this. Since he was so newly created, he was not familiar with all the parts of the Earth as they had existed throughout time. In truth, he was enjoying this almost as much as Amanda appeared to be.

"Now, let me think," Amanda murmured. She nodded. "The cabin," she said. "I remember a picture I saw once. It showed the inside of a real log cabin. Homer," she asked. "I don't need to worry about my body here, do I? I mean, I don't have to eat, or sleep, or things like that anymore, do I?"

"No, you don't have to," said Homer. "You can eat, if you like, just to enjoy the taste of the food, or you can sleep, but you don't need to. Why?"

"Well," said Amanda, a serious expression on her face. "I wasn't sure if I should put in a kitchen or not."

Homer hid a grin. "I'd make it just like you've always dreamed, Mrs. Amanda. You wouldn't have to use it all the time."

"Right. That's right," said Amanda. "You're a wise little angel, Homer."

Homer's chest swelled. How good it felt to be appreciated by his very own saint.

Amanda returned to building her dream house. Slowly, as a fledgling artist makes the first tentative brush stroke on a canvas, she spoke again. The outline of a log cabin appeared, nestled beside a beautiful oak tree that stood in a little grove of other trees.

Suddenly, a bright, sparkling little stream appeared on one side of the cabin. A stream that tumbled cheerfully on its way to an unseen Heavenly river. Its gurgling rush played harmony with the merry bird songs.

The cabin took further form. Homer could see curtains appear inside at the windows. A wisp of smoke lazily drifted upward from a chimney. There was no apparent activity for a few minutes, but by the smile on Amanda's face, Homer knew she was lovingly furnishing each room in the little cabin.

Finally, her face shining with joy, she turned to Homer and said, "How do you like it?"

"It's beautiful!" said Homer. "Mrs. Amanda, it's just right for you. Bless you. I hope you will be very happy here."

"Oh, Homer, I know I will. It's what I've always dreamed of. How good of the Lord to let me have just what I always wanted for my mansion in Heaven."

She paused for a moment. "But, Homer...."

He saw her brow wrinkle thoughtfully.

"I do have one question. I'm a little confused. All of this," she waved her hand toward the beautiful, peaceful log cabin scene before them. "All of this takes up a lot of room. Now I know that the building we came into was tall, but what I did here would just about fill it up.

"And, Homer, we rode up in something that looked like an elevator but was faster than a jet. We walked down the hall to a door marked 402-A. Since we came upstairs, that means there ought to be a downstairs. And since I'm on the 4th floor, there ought to be three floors below, and other apartments numbered 401, 402-B and so on.

"Now, Homer, how is all that possible in this *one* building?" She fixed Homer with a stern yet questioning glance.

"I don't know," Homer said, shrugging his shoulders. "That's the Lord's department. He prepared all the mansions this way. Somehow there's space for all the kinds of things His children could want here in their Heavenly home in just a few streets of buildings.

"Maybe He thought it would be cozier that way. I don't know *how* He did it, Mrs. Amanda. Or how He could. I guess He did it 'cause..." he gulped, " just 'cause he's GOD."

His whisper was awed and reverent.

They both stood for a moment, thinking of the Most High One whose best was better than anything they could ever have imagined.

Homer finally cleared his throat and held out his hand to his very own saint. "Come on, Mrs. Amanda," he said. "Let me take you into your new home."

END