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Opening extract from  
**So you want to  
be a Space Alien**

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### ***At the Cat Sanctuary***

Charlotte stood by the little wooden cross and tried not to cry. She looked at her older brother Ian, who was scuffing the ground with his toe and making little circles in the dirt. Five year old Esme, who was the baby of the family, was holding tightly onto her mother's hand and was trying to drag her back in the direction of the house. "He was a lovely cat," said Charlotte, with tears rolling down her face. "I wish he hadn't died."

Nobody answered. "Listen, children," said Mum, "you need to think that poor mouser is out of pain, now, and is resting in his own special world."

"Can we have another cat?" asked Charlotte, looking directly at her mother. Mum sighed crossly. "Wait and see," was all that she said, however.

Later that evening the two older children sat on the bed in Charlotte's room and discussed the situation. "He was only an old cat," said Ian dismissively. "Not much use for playing footie or going on the internet. Don't be such a wimp, Charlotte."

"He was my cat and I loved him. And he was a member of the family," said Charlotte fiercely. "Who wants to play footie anyway? That's all you ever think about!"

“Girls!” exclaimed Ian. “I’m going to play for Man U one day, just see if I don’t!” He got to his feet and stomped out of the room, making sure that Charlotte was unable to see the tears that were beginning to form at the corners of his eyes. Charlotte rolled over onto her side and reached for her latest book. It was called, *So You Want To Be A Space Alien*.

Three weeks later, the two girls stood on either side of their mother and peered at the assorted company of cats that were before them. They were at a cat rescue sanctuary, and Ian had gone to yet another football practice.

“Oh look, Mummy,” cried Esme, “come and see this one. Isn’t it sweet?” Esme pointed into a pen where a little white ball of fluff was slowly uncurling itself and stretching out a claw.

“Isn’t he gorgeous,” agreed Mum. “Come and look, Charlotte.” Charlotte stared at the little creature and smiled as it got to its feet and started to prance around the cage.

“I’m afraid that one’s very young,” said the helper who was accompanying them. “He would need a lot of looking after.”

“I would look after him,” said Esme, poking a fat finger in the cage to touch the kitten.

“Well, maybe with a bit of help,” said Mum, with a twinkle in her eye. Suddenly her attention was caught by a shout from Charlotte,

who had moved away, and was staring into a pen further down the row.

“Mum, Mum! Come and look at this one!”

“What have you found, Charlotte?”

“Do come and have a look!” Mum moved along and looked to where Charlotte was pointing. There, at the back of the cage, sitting with dignified elegance was a brown cat. He had huge yellow eyes and seemed to be gazing into the middle distance.

“I’m afraid we don’t know much about this fellow,” said the helper. “He was sitting outside the gate when I got to work yesterday morning and followed me in. He seemed to want to be in here. We’ve made enquiries, but no one has reported a Burmese cat missing.”

“Burmese?” asked Mum.

“It’s a certain breed of cat. They’re supposed to be very friendly to human beings. They like a lot of company.”

“What’s his name?” asked Esme.

“Try asking him,” said Charlotte sarcastically. “You know that animals can’t talk, Esme.”

“We call him Joseph,” said the helper quickly. The sleek brown cat turned his head and stared at Charlotte. She thought for a second that he had closed one eye.

“Mum, I think Joseph wants to come home with us,” said Charlotte firmly.

“Do you darling? And what do you think Esme?”

“I like the little white kitty. I want to look after him,” said Esme in her baby voice. Charlotte sighed. As she looked at the well groomed, glossy brown creature, she was certain that once again he winked an eye. Mum realised that she would have to make a decision.

“How old is the kitten?” she asked.

“Just twelve weeks,” came the reply. “The mother got run over.”

“And the brown cat? The Burmese?”

“We really don’t know,” said the helper. “We think he may be two or three. He’s in beautiful condition, but apart from that we know nothing about him.” Mum made up her mind. “Sorry Charlotte,” she said, “but I really think it would be a mistake to take home an older animal that we know nothing about. Apart from that, he was found only a couple of days ago, and it could be that his real owners will find him and want him back. I think we have to decide on the white kitten.”

Charlotte sighed again. She could really see the sense in what Mum was saying. But even so . . . She looked once again at the beautiful brown creature. He had now closed his eyes, but the long tail was swishing from side to side.

Meanwhile Esme had gone back to the white kitten and was being allowed to pick it up and hold it. She gently clasped it to her chest and then let out a shrill cry of pain as a claw was sunk long and deep into her arm. “Owww!” she cried as she dropped the offending bundle of fur. “He hurt me.”

Charlotte, instead of running to her little sister to help, felt an unaccountable urge to turn and look at the cat called Joseph. He stared back with expressionless yellow eyes and a very still tail. "You see," he seemed to be saying, "I have more sense than that."

Staunching the blood from Esme's arm, Mum began to get a little bit flustered. (And when she got flustered did she get cross!) The helper was on her knees trying to capture the white kitten. Esme was crying loudly and saying that she didn't want a cat that scratched. "Be quiet, Esme!" said Mum sharply, tossing her long ponytail from side to side, "we really can't have all this fuss!" Esme rubbed her wet cheeks with her sleeve.

Charlotte and Joseph continued to look at each other.

"What made you decide on this one then?" asked Dad, as he stroked the sleek brown fur. The children had gone to bed, and Joseph was purring away with contentment on Dad's lap.

"He's a nice cat, isn't he?" said Mum. She was slowly combing her long brown hair and looking thoughtful. "But I don't think we chose him. I think he chose us. Charlotte wants to keep his name as Joseph."

Dad smiled. Little was he to know what trouble was in store.

