

SAMPLE

Perfect Gifts

by

Paul McCusker

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Augustine Institute
Greenwood Village, CO

Augustine Institute

6160 S. Syracuse Way, Suite 310

Greenwood Village, CO 80111

Tel: (866) 767-3155

www.augustineinstitute.org

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Introduction



Nicholas and Samantha Perry are twins. Nicholas is often called Nick and Samantha is called Sam. They are seven years old. Very soon they will be eight years old.

They have an older brother named Andrew and an older sister named Lizzy. The name Lizzy is short for Elizabeth. Their parents are named Jon and Belle.

Nick and Sam have a good friend named Brad Wilkes. Brad comes to their house to play. He sometimes leads Nick and Sam into trouble.

Early in the summer the Perry family moved to a town called Hope Springs. Hope Springs is near the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. It is a town that has a lot of fun things to do.

Nick and Sam like Hope Springs. They visited relatives there when they were growing up. Their church is called St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church. In the fall, Nick and Sam will go to the Catholic school next to the church.

Our stories will tell about Nick's and Sam's life in Hope Springs. Maybe their lives are a lot like yours.

CHAPTER ONE



The Birthday Gifts

Nick and Sam Perry ran through the woods like the end of summer was chasing them.

And it was.

August had arrived. Summer would be over soon. Every day was one day closer to the start of school.

But first they had a birthday to celebrate. Nick and Sam were twins. Their birthday was August 11th. This coming Saturday!

Sam stopped and bent down onto

her knees to catch her breath. Her dark brown hair was tied back. It fell around her face. She pushed it back.

Nick stopped next to her. "Hurry or he'll get there first," Nick said.

Their friend Brad Wilkes was riding his bike to their house. The twins were on foot. They were racing from the ice cream shop to see who got to the front porch first.

Nick and Sam sprinted onward. They reached the edge of the woods. Their neighborhood was just ahead. They used Mr. Filby's backyard as a shortcut. He was mowing his lawn. He waved to them.

They reached the street and crossed over to their house.

"Did we beat him?" Sam asked.

Just then Brad stepped around the tree in the front yard. "Ha," he said.

Nick groaned. "I would have won if I had a Special Edition High Road mountain bike," he said.

“Maybe you’ll get one for your birthday,” Brad teased.

The three kids walked into the house and went through to the kitchen. Glasses were pulled from the cupboard. Sam got a pitcher of lemonade from the refrigerator. She poured, and they sat down at the kitchen table.

Nick saw his mom in the back garden. She was digging at the weeds in the flower bed.

“What do you think you’ll get for your birthday?” Brad asked.

“I asked for the RetroBlaster game system,” Nick said. “I hope they remember.”

“How could they forget?” Sam asked. “You’ve been talking about it for weeks!”

“Maybe you should have asked for the Special Edition High Road mountain bike,” said Brad. He took a big gulp of his lemonade.

“I did. My dad said it costs too much. He wants me to save up for it on my own,” Nick said.

“What do you want?” Brad asked Sam.

“I want a Polly Playtime Doll with all the extra clothes and the big playhouse,” she said.

The two boys rolled their eyes.

“That sounds like a waste of a good birthday gift,” Brad said. “My parents always get me things that I need. Clothes and shoes and stuff for school.”

Nick looked worried. “What if Mom and Dad give me something I don’t want?”

“Maybe they’ll give you a Polly Playtime Doll,” Brad said with a laugh.

Sam giggled. “I might let you play with my dolls,” she said.

Nick frowned. He looked up at the ceiling. His parents’ bedroom was

right above them. "I'll bet our presents are hidden in their closet."

"How do you know?" Brad asked.

"That's where they always hide them," Nick said.

Sam shook her head. "You know the rule. We're not allowed in there," she said.

Nick stood up and paced around the room. He looked out the large window that faced the backyard. His mom had her back to them as she pulled at the weeds.

"You could sneak up and check," Brad said.

Nick looked at Brad, then at Sam.

"I'll stay here and watch for your mom," said Brad.

It wouldn't hurt anything to have a quick peek, Nick thought. "Come on, Sam," Nick said to his sister.

She looked surprised. "But we're not allowed," she said.

“I just want to see,” Nick said.
“Don’t you want to know? What if you get a boring bracelet or a pair of socks?”

“They’ve never done that before,” Sam said. “They normally get us what we want.”

Nick smirked at her. “What about the year you got that play kitchen when you asked for a puppy?” he asked.

Sam pursed her lips.

“Remember how upset you were?” Nick asked.

Sam stood up and looked outside at their mother. “Okay,” she said.

The twins dashed from the kitchen and up the stairs. They ran through their parents’ bedroom to the closet door and slowly pushed it open. The closet was the walk-in kind. On one side their dad’s clothes hung on racks. Their mom’s clothes hung on



the other side. The shelves on the far wall were filled with the kinds of boxes and keepsakes grown-ups always seemed to have.

“Where would they hide them?” Sam asked.

Nick took a few steps to the back corner of the closet. Clothes hung down in front of a stack of boxes.

“This is a good hiding place,” he said. He pushed the clothes aside.

The flaps of the lid on the top box were slightly open.

Sam stepped up to look.

“Aha!” Nick said. He reached in and pulled out a smaller box. The name Sam was written on the top in their mother’s handwriting.

Sam’s eyes were wide. She took the box from his hands and opened it up. Inside was a glass figurine of a ballerina. Sam was surprised. The ballerina had been in a display window

at a gift shop downtown. She had told her mom that she thought it was pretty.



Nick grunted and dug into the box again. “I see a box for a Polly Playtime doll in here,” he said.

“Really?” Sam said with a little squeal. “Can I see?”

“We don’t have time to take everything out,” Nick said. He rummaged in the

box some more. He thought for sure his parents had forgotten his game. Then he saw a large box at the bottom with the words “RetroBlaster” on the side. “It’s here!” he cried out.

Just then they heard a door slam downstairs.

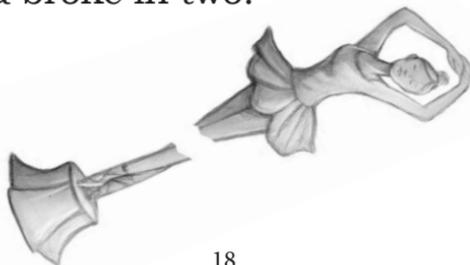
In a loud voice Brad said, “Hi, Mrs. Perry!”

Sam gasped. “It’s Mom!”

“Oh no!” Nick said.

Sam reached forward to put the glass ballerina away. Nick spun around to close the box. They bumped into each other.

The ballerina flew out of Sam’s hands. It fell onto the carpet. It bounced. Then it hit the bottom of a wooden shelf. There was a small cracking sound. The ballerina broke in two.



The twins put their hands over their mouths to keep from crying out.

“What do we do?” Sam cried out in a whisper.

“We have to put it back in the box!” Nick said.

They could hear their mom and Brad talking downstairs.

Tears filled Sam’s eyes as she picked up the two pieces. They put it into the gift box and then the larger box. They ran out of the closet.

When they reached the top of the stairs they saw Brad at the bottom. He said, “I have to go home now.”

Nick nodded. “See you later,” he said.

Brad walked away.

Sam turned to Nick. “We broke my present!” she whispered.

“Maybe they won’t look at it again,” Nick said. “They’ll wrap it and you can look surprised when you open it up.”

“But we broke it!” Sam said. Her eyes were wide.

Nick felt sick. “I’m going to my room,” he said.

New tears came to Sam’s eyes. She ran to her bedroom.

Nick heard his mom come up the stairs.

“I’m going to wash up,” she called out. He heard her footsteps fade down the hall as she went into her bedroom. After a few minutes, he heard the water running in the shower.

Sam came to Nick’s doorway. She wiped her eyes. “Mom will know,” she said.

“How?” he asked. “We put everything back.”

“Are you sure?” Sam asked.

Nick wondered. Had they? Did he close the big box? Did he move his dad’s clothes back in front of it?

The next ten minutes were painful.

They listened together as the shower stopped. They imagined their mom getting dressed in the closet. They wondered if she would know they had sneaked in.

“She won’t know,” Nick said to Sam.

They heard their mom come out into the hall. “Nicholas! Samantha! Where are you?” she called out.

They knew that tone of voice. The twins froze where they were.

Their mom appeared in Nick’s doorway. In her hands was the broken ballerina.