

# A Christmas Kitten Mystery

by  
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Samantha wanted a kitten for Christmas. A kitten is what she wanted, and a kitten is all she wanted. Her mother asked her almost every day to make a list for Santa, but Samantha would only smile and say, “Santa doesn’t need a list. He knows what I want!”

Christmas day was getting closer and closer, and Samantha’s mother didn’t know what to do. Without a list, how would Santa know what to bring Samantha? She discussed it with Samantha’s father one evening after he came home from work.

“She won’t give you a list?” he asked. “That’s odd. She’s never asked for much, but at least she always puts a few things on her Santa list! Do you have any idea what she wants?”

“Not a one,” Samantha’s mother admitted. “She hasn’t mentioned any dolls or toys at all. I haven’t even seen her looking through any of the toy catalogs! She just keeps saying that Santa knows what she wants, and that Santa doesn’t need a list!”

“Well, I don’t know what we’ll do,” said Samantha’s father, scratching his head. “We only have one weekend left until Christmas. I suppose we’ll just have to get her some toys or dolls or something and hope for the best!”

“I suppose,” agreed Samantha’s mother. “But what if we’re wrong? She’ll be terribly disappointed, and she may never believe in Santa Claus again!”

“I know,” said Samantha’s father, “but sooner or later we all stop believing, don’t we?”

“Yes, we all do, sooner or later,” said Samantha’s mother. She sounded very sad at the thought of Samantha never believing in Santa again.

Samantha’s father then had a thought. “Maybe she has told her sister!”

“Nope,” replied Samantha’s mother. “Already thought of that! But at least we know what Meg wants. Have you seen her list?”

“I’ve seen it,” Samantha’s father replied. “Are there any electronic toys that she doesn’t know about? She even wants her own computer! And what is an ‘MP3’ player, anyway?”

“Well,” said Samantha’s mother, “you do complain about her being on your computer all the time. Remember that virus she accidentally downloaded? As for the MP3 player, I have no idea. She says all her friends have one, though.”

“Her friends have lots of things!” Samantha’s father snorted. “Maybe their parents are made out of money, but we’re not!”

“Now, dear, don’t worry!” Samantha’s mother consoled him. “We know that Meg can’t have everything on her list. Santa will just have to choose for her. Anyway, it’s Samantha that I’m worried about!”

At that very moment Samantha was in her room. She was lying on her bed reading a book about a little boy who wanted to go to the North Pole to see Santa Clause. Even though no one else in the story believed in Santa, he did. And he refused to give up on the idea of going to the North Pole to see Santa for himself!

Samantha laid the book aside and looked around her room. There were shelves covered with dolls on almost every wall. There were Barbie dolls, Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy dolls, all sorts of dolls, big and small. There were even expensive “collector” dolls that Samantha had never even taken out of their boxes, much less played with!

In one corner of her room was a large elaborate dollhouse that her father had brought back from one of his business trips. She remembered when he gave it to her, just two birthdays ago. He had spent hours putting it together and setting it up for her, only to tell her that it was really just to look at, not to play with.

Samantha sighed. She knew that her parents loved her, but her mother worked in town and her father was always gone away on business. She had her sister Meg, but Meg thought she was too old to play with Samantha. When Meg’s friends came over, they acted as if Samantha wasn’t even there!

What Samantha really wanted was her own special friend, one that would be hers and hers alone. One that would always have time to play with her! Santa knew

what she wanted, and he wouldn't let her down! Samantha smiled at the thought and went back to her reading.

Christmas morning finally came, and Samantha was up before anyone else. She rushed down the stairs to where the family Christmas tree had been set up in the living room. There were boxes and boxes piled under the tree, all wrapped in bright paper. There were red boxes and green boxes, all different colors of boxes.

But Samantha was not interested in something that might be in a box. She knew that kittens didn't come in boxes! She pushed the boxes aside, looking for something that might have a kitten in it!

Maybe the kitten is in the tree, she thought! Kittens like to climb trees! So she looked all up in the tree, but there was no kitten hiding on any of the branches! Then she looked all under and around the tree one more time, but there was no kitten to be found!

By this time, her parents and Meg had come down to see what the noise was about. They found Samantha sitting in the middle of all the boxes, a look of forlorn disappointment slowly spreading across her face.

“What's wrong, sweetheart?” her mother asked. “Have you looked at what Santa brought you yet? Why no, you haven't opened a single one of your presents! Here, let me pick one for you!” She chose a large box wrapped in bright red paper. A label on the box read “To Samantha from Santa!”

“Here, open this one first!” she urged. “It’s from Santa!”

Samantha thought for a moment, then brightened. Maybe kittens do come in boxes! But no, there was no kitten in the box. Instead, there was another doll, in yet another box. Samantha looked at it. Samantha knew about dolls, and could tell at once that it was one of those expensive collector dolls that she would never be allowed to play with!

There were other boxes to open, and Samantha tried her best to act surprised and pleased at each gift. There were some new clothes, a few toys that she had never mentioned or asked for, and a couple of books.

Soon wrapping paper was strewn all about the floor and there were no more boxes to open. Samantha’s parents had gone into the kitchen to begin cooking breakfast. Meg had gone to her room with her new MP3 player, but not before complaining loudly that she had really wanted a computer!

Samantha sat on the floor, surrounded by wrapping paper and empty boxes. There had been one doll in one box that she could play with, and she sat hugging it and wondering how Santa could have forgotten her. She was beginning to believe that the little boy in the story was wrong! Maybe Santa didn’t exist!

Suddenly the doorbell rang! Samantha didn’t move. She expected one of her parents to come out of the kitchen and answer it. Instead, her mother called out,

“Sam? Can you get that? Be sure to look through the peephole first to see who it is!”

Samantha wasn't tall enough to look through the peephole without first finding something to stand on, so she got a chair and dragged it over to the door. She climbed up on the chair and looked through the small glass hole. There was no one there, at least that she could see! Well, she had always been told never to open the door to strangers! She pulled the chair away from the door and was about to go up to her room when the doorbell rang again.

“Who is it, honey?” her mother called from the kitchen.

“I don't know,” Samantha called back. “I can't see!”

“Well, go ahead and open the door,” said her mother. “We're here, so it's all right!”

Samantha did what her mother had told her to do. She opened the door and looked out. She still didn't see anyone! Then something caught her eye, something she hadn't noticed before!

There was a basket sitting just outside the door! It was a woven basket with a large curved handle. Whatever was inside the basket was covered with a bright red blanket. She reached down to pick up the basket, but before her hand touched the handle she heard an amazing sound! It was a meow! It sounded like a kitten! Then a small round face appeared from beneath the folds of the bright red blanket!

A kitten! A snow white kitten! Santa had remembered after all!

Samantha scooped the kitten up in her arms and ran back inside the house.

“Mommy! Mommy!” she called out. “Come look! Santa remembered! He remembered!”

“What?” her mother asked excitedly as she came running from the kitchen with her father close behind. “What did you say about Santa?”

“Look!” Samantha cried, holding up the kitten for them to see. “Santa remembered! He didn’t forget!”

“A kitten!” her mother exclaimed. “Where on earth did that come from? Santa remembered? Is that what you were hoping Santa would bring?”

“Oh, yes!” said Samantha. “A kitten is all I ever wanted! And Santa knew! He didn’t forget!”

Samantha’s father went to the door and picked up the basket and brought it in. He noticed a small white card, neatly folded and tied to the handle with a bright red ribbon. He opened the card and found a note hand written in gleaming gold letters. He read, “Dear Samantha, My name is Jingles. If you will love me and take care of me, I promise to always love you and play whenever you want!”

“Oh, yes!” cried Samantha. “I do love you, Jingles! I promise! I will always take care of you!”

Samantha's father then pulled the red blanket from the basket. When he did, a small golden bell tied with a red ribbon fell to the floor and made a bright jingling sound. "Well," he said, "now we know where the name came from!"

He picked up the bell and looked at it. "It must have come untied while he, or she, was in the basket," he said. "By the way, what is it? I mean, is it a he or a she?"

"It's a she," Samantha assured him.

"How do you know?" her father asked.

"Because that's what I asked for!" Samantha replied.

"Oh, I see," said her father. He then turned to Samantha's mother. "Can I see you in the kitchen for a minute?"

Samantha's parents went into the kitchen. Samantha could hear them talking, but she paid no attention. All of her attention was on Jingles. She tied the red ribbon and the golden bell in a neat bow around Jingle's neck. There, she thought, just right! Now you really are Jingles!

In the kitchen, Samantha's parents, unknown to her, were debating Jingle's future. "But a kitten!" her father protested. "How were we to know she wanted a kitten? And you know how I feel about animals in the house! It may be a cute kitten now, but kittens grow and pretty soon you have a cat on your hands, not to mention on everything else!"

“I know, dear,” Samantha’s mother replied. “But what can we do now? It would break her heart to have to give it up!”

“I guess you’re right,” Samantha’s father finally agreed. “But I still want to know where it came from!”

He picked up the phone in the kitchen and began calling everyone he could think of. He called Samantha’s grandparents. He called her aunts and uncles. They all gave him the same answer. “A kitten? No, we didn’t send Samantha a kitten! We didn’t even know she wanted a kitten!”

“Well,” said Samantha’s father after he had called everyone he knew, “this really is a mystery. This kitten apparently just appeared on our doorstep! No one will take credit, or blame, for it!”

“But it had to come from somewhere!” said Samantha’s mother. “Kittens don’t just show up on your doorstep like that! Someone had to bring it!”

“You’re right!” said Samantha’s father. “I’m going to have another look at that basket! Maybe there’s a clue on it somewhere!”

He went back out into the living room and found Samantha playing with Jingles. She had balled up a piece of red Christmas wrapping paper and Jingles was happily batting it around on the floor, her little bell jingling merrily. Samantha laughed and laughed! It had been a long time since Samantha’s father had heard her laugh like that!

He picked up the basket from the floor. It looked like a hand-made basket, but there still should be a sticker on it somewhere. That would at least tell him where the basket had been made.

He turned the basket over and looked on the bottom. He looked on the sides and he looked on the handle, but he could find no sticker. He did notice, however, that the basket was woven very tightly and was very well made. I believe this basket would almost hold water, he thought!

He was about to give up when something on the bottom caught his eye. On one corner, in neat gold letters was painted “NP.”

“NP,” he said to himself. “Is that someone’s initials? I don’t know anyone with those initials!”

He then picked up the small red blanket that the kitten had been wrapped in. It was made of some sort of wool, soft in his hands, much softer than any wool he had ever felt before! Maybe it had a label on it somewhere! But no, he could find no label. Instead, in one corner, stitched in bright gold thread were the same letters, NP.

“Honey, can you come in here a minute?” he called to Samantha’s mother.

“What is it, dear?” she asked as she entered the room.

“Look,” he said, holding out the blanket, “I can’t find a sticker or label anywhere on the blanket or the basket! All I can find is this!”

He showed her the letters on the blanket and on the bottom of the basket. She seemed as puzzled by them as he had been.

“NP?” she asked out loud. “Who in the world is NP? We don’t know anybody by that name who makes baskets or blankets, do we?”

“Not that I know of,” Samantha’s father replied. “But whoever made them does wonderful work! Just look at them! I’ve never seen anything like it!”

Samantha, although she was still playing with Jingles, had been listening. She looked up at her father and smiled.

“Don’t be silly, Daddy!” Samantha told him. “Everyone knows that Santa’s elves are the best! And Santa’s workshop is at the North Pole!”

With that, she went back to playing with Jingles while her mother and father just stood there looking at each other. Santa Clause? Elves? North Pole?

Finally her father shook his head and said, “No, it couldn’t be!”

He then noticed the card that had been attached to the handle of the basket. He picked it up and read it again. How could someone have known about Samantha’s special Christmas wish? How could they have known that she wanted a kitten?

He stood with the card in his hands. He read it again and again, still doubting, still not believing. He then turned the card over and for the first time

noticed that something was written on the back in the same neat gold letters. This is what he read:

*“If you believe in me, you believe in the gift of love and the wonder of wishes that somehow come true!”*

From that day on, Samantha had her special friend to play with whenever she wanted, and she never stopped believing!