

Chapter 1

Birthday Surprises

“Happy birthday, Katie!” Amy yelled as she ran over to her group of friends. Although she was normally shy in public, Amy was bubbly and herself when she was around her best friends. The girls had become friends several years before when they went to a summer camp together as part of a church group. Ever since then, Amy, Jennifer, Morgan, Katie, and Nikki had become almost inseparable. Katie was the youngest in the group having turned ten today, and the rest of the girls were already eleven. Amy was the oldest, as she would be the first to turn twelve in August. Even though Katie was younger, she had been moved up two years in school and was in sixth grade with the rest of the girls because she was so smart. She had always gotten straight A’s, and she hardly ever had to study. Sometimes it bothered her older sister, Morgan, because Morgan had to study hard to keep her grades as good as they were. But Morgan was a good student too, so she never got mad or jealous of how easy school seemed for Katie.

“So are you excited about turning ten, Katie?” asked Amy’s mom, Mrs. Madison. She worked at Faith Bible Chapel, where the girls and their families went to church.

“I guess so. It’s kind of exciting since I’m almost a teenager now,” Katie answered.

“Well, enjoy each year as it comes, dear. Believe me, they go by fast enough!” said Mrs. Madison as she walked off to chat with some of the other parents at the party.

“So, Katie, what are you doing tomorrow for your birthday?” Nikki asked.

“Well, after church we’re gonna go play miniature golf at Sleepy Hollow. Then we’ll go out for pizza since it’s my favorite, and Dad has some special movie planned at the theater just for us to watch! He won’t tell me what it is. He said it’s going to be a big surprise,” Katie said as she looked questioningly over at her older sister.

“I don’t know either, I swear!” Morgan squealed as she threw her hands up defensively.

Just then, Katie’s mom announced that it was time to cut the cake, and everyone went over to the picnic table. Mrs. Johnson had spent all day Friday making the food and cake for the party, and everything looked wonderful! The cake was decorated in pink icing with white daisies and green leaves, and it looked good enough that a professional baker could have made it. Mrs. Johnson loved to bake and cook, and since she was a homemaker, she had become very good at baking all sorts of goodies, which always sounded good to Katie and Morgan’s younger brother, Gabe, who was four and loved to lick the spoon whenever his mom was done baking.

Everyone sang *Happy Birthday* to Katie, and Gabe made funny faces at his sister as she blew out her candles. Katie blew them all out with one deep breath, and everyone clapped as Mrs. Johnson removed the candles and sliced the cake.

As they ate their cake and ice cream, they chatted and laughed until it was time to open the presents. Katie started opening her gifts but saved the ones from her best friends for last, knowing they would be special. When she got to them, she opened Jennifer’s first. It was a dark blue backpack with her name in white on the front with a little daisy next to it.

“You can keep all of your writing stuff in this backpack, Katie, and use your other one just for school now,” Jennifer said. Katie’s passion had always been writing stories, and she was quite good at it. All the girls knew she planned to be a writer when she grew up.

“Thank you, Jennifer! I love it,” Katie exclaimed with a smile.

“Open mine next, Katie!” Amy shouted excitedly.

As she ripped the wrapping paper off of the small box and opened it, everyone could see the silver pen and pencil set with Katie’s name engraved along the sides in gold.

“Oh, they’re beautiful, Amy. Thank you!” Katie said.

Next Katie reached for Nikki’s present. Inside, she found copies of the books *Charlotte’s*

Web, *Stuart Little*, and *The Trumpet and the Swan*, which she had been wanting for some time.

“You remembered, Nikki! Thank you so much!” she exclaimed as she reached over and hugged her friend.

“You’re welcome,” Nikki answered with a smile.

Finally, she opened her sister’s gift. “I think it’s a book,” Katie guessed, feeling the present through the paper. As she removed the wrapping, she sat staring at the book. It was a beautiful leather-bound copy of Katie’s favorite book, *Anne of Green Gables*, with gold lettering imprinted on the cover and spine.

“It’s beautiful,” Katie said, still fingering the cover gently as she looked up and saw Morgan smiling at her.

“I know it’s your favorite,” Morgan said as Katie got up to hug her big sister.

“Thank you so much, Morgan. I love it,” Katie whispered as everyone shouted “happy birthday” again.

Mrs. Johnson started to clean up, and Mr. Johnson took Gabe in for a well-deserved nap while the kids went off to play games and listen to music in the backyard. But as they chatted and laughed, every once in a while Morgan would look up to see Katie smiling at her again.

Later that evening, after the party was over and everyone had gone home, Katie went into Morgan’s room and asked, “Where did you find that book? I’ve never seen one like it. It must’ve cost you way too much!”

But Morgan just answered, “I just happened to find it in a bookstore, and I thought of you,” not telling her sister she had saved her allowance for two months to be able to buy the book.

“Thanks, Morgan. I love it, and I’ll always treasure it,” Katie said.

And as Katie went down the hall to her bedroom, Morgan couldn’t help thinking it was worth not buying that new CD she had wanted to see how happy her present had made Katie. And

she had to smile to herself.

The next night, the Johnson family enjoyed a very competitive round of miniature golf, which Morgan won. Gabe came in second only because he kept cheating by picking up his ball, walking it over to the hole, and dropping it in. But everyone had a good time.

Then, after enjoying pizza at Ray's, they all settled into one of the theaters at the Movie House, which the Johnson family owned. The last showing of the movie of the week was still playing in the other theater, but the last showing of the movie in this theater had been cancelled so the special presentation for the Johnson family could be shown. As Mr. Johnson settled into his seat and the lights dimmed, Katie waited in anticipation as credits sprang onto the screen and music filled the theater. Everyone began to clap and shout, and Katie squealed as the title flashed up on the big screen: the surprise movie was *Pollyanna*, one of her favorites. Her dad had ordered the reel especially for this night, and it was a wonderful private showing the family all enjoyed.

After the movie, the Johnson family headed home. Katie crept into her bed and thought how this had been the best birthday ever. Nothing could top all the fun and surprises she had had this year. She eventually drifted off to sleep with a smile on her face and a prayer thanking God for how much He had blessed her.