



A Baby for Christmas

by Gwynne Wiatrowski Guzzeau

My son was born eight years ago and my favorite earrings arrived a year later with a matching necklace. The earrings and necklace were a long time coming. Gary gave them to me for Christmas, but he was supposed to give them to me when Garrison was born.

I never knew that husbands gave their wives presents when they had a baby until my brother gave his wife a diamond cross from Tiffany's when their first child was born. "Can you believe it!" Cindy smiled looking up, hair washed, fresh make-up and Helena in her arms. The diamonds glittered in the fluorescent light of the hospital maternity ward. I don't know if he kept up that standard for the next two.

Well, at least I didn't ask for a diamond cross. Just a silver necklace from Tiffany's. It seemed so easy. I described it to my husband and even told him how much it would cost.



Garrison was born December 23. The wild rush of birth lingered for a day, but it didn't last. Since moving to the maternity ward, I'd been sinking deeper into the worn-out mattress. When I tried to get out of bed, I was stuck in a sagging ravine. So, I called the hospital complaint line and then I called Gary.

"Hello?"

"It's me. Don't worry about the necklace. Just get back here soon, okay?"

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"How you doing, honey? How about our little monkey?"

"He's not a monkey!"

"No, no. Course not. Is he still all red?"

"Yes he's still red. And the skin around his feet and ankles is peeling. I guess it's normal. I asked the nurse."

"I'm sure he's fine. Look. I've got a few stops to make on my way over."

"Can you stop at Furins? You know, the deli at 29th and M. I've been thinking about their sugar cookies all morning."

"Sure. I'll stop. Think they'll be open until 4?"

"I don't know. Just hurry and you won't miss them."

The sugar cookies from Furins are the best I've ever tasted. A fan of making Christmas sugar cookies, it's one of the few things I remember

doing with my mother as a kid. Furins cookies have a hint of lemon and the fact that they're made in a family-owned café only improves the flavor.

I used to stop there sometimes after therapy. I'd have a cup of tea or an Orangina with a sugar cookie. One time, I even sent two cookies to another table. A father was having breakfast with his daughter who looked about eight years old. It reminded me of the breakfasts and meals out with my father – just him and me.

Now it was Garrison and me. And where was Gary? It was Christmas Eve. He'd left the hospital around 6:00 pm the night before and I hadn't seen him since. It seemed like I hadn't seen anyone, except for a brief visit from my mother, sister and my niece, Helena.

Where were all the visitors? Where were all the flowers? And where were my cookies? I'd called my friends but most of them were out of town for the holidays. That's what happens when you live in Washington, D.C. Everyone is from someplace else, and that's where they go for Christmas.

The hospital seemed empty, except for the maternity ward full of new mothers and babies – not that I saw any of them. We were each huddled in our room with our little bundles. Locked in a mysterious trance, I would gaze into Garrison's pinched red face.

The day before Gary said, "He looks like he just got back from South Beach." I shot him a dirty look and pulled the baby closer. Gary was right, of course, but I was losing it. I'd swing from mother-love to mother-fury to mother-fear – like a monkey swinging from tree to tree.

In sixth grade social studies, we spent months learning about baboons. Now, I was one of the mother baboons in the movies from that class. When I wasn't floating in my new found mother-love, I was fretting. I was the kind of baboon the narrator singles out for commentary. "This new mother appears overprotective. Her isolation from the rest of the troop signifies her uncertainty. Notice her furtive glances as others approach to see the newborn."

If only she'd had some sugar cookies from Furins.

It started snowing around 3 p.m. I called home again but Gary had already left. I estimated the driving time from home to Furins to the hospital. He should've been here by now. The snow must have delayed him. I didn't know what time Furins closed and was starting to worry. So, I buzzed the nurse station.

Long gone were the stellar labor and delivery nurses. It wasn't until after I left the hospital that I learned that it's standard practice to employ the most skilled nurses in labor and delivery. I was on the maternity ward now and it was Christmas.

Even so, the lactation nurses were out in force preaching their own brand of salvation. My tentative questions about breastfeeding were met with hardcore answers such as, "If it hurts, you're doing it wrong."

I wanted to cry.

Later, I asked a maternity nurse about this comment and she rolled her eyes and handed me a large tube of lanolin to relieve soreness. I stashed the tube in my bag along with the one I'd brought with me. I thought about the fanatic's other comment: "One tube should last you ten years."

Luckily my midwife stopped in to visit. She advised, "Just shove as much of your breast in his mouth as possible." Maybe I wasn't losing it, maybe I was a baboon.

Gary finally showed up around 6 p.m. No cookies. No necklace. He said that he had some earrings and I perked up. He handed them to me and I realized that he'd brought some earrings from my jewelry box. I was crying when the nurse came in to check on me. Gary was gone again, down the hall, in search of cookies from the snack machine.

"They had some lemon crèmes. How's that?" Gary's smile and step were tentative as he came back in and sat down next to the bed. I nodded and took the cookies.

Gary explained that he'd gone to Tiffany's just after 4 p.m., but it'd closed early for Christmas. Williams Sonoma was next door and they were still open, so he bought me an electric knife sharpener and a rice cooker to put under the tree.

It didn't matter. We had Garrison. The next year, Gary gave me a silver necklace and matching earrings. They weren't from Tiffany's, there were from my favorite craft gallery. They were one of a kind.

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