

An Unexpected Christmas

A Christmas story



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Joey turned one at the end of November. Last Christmas he had been only a tiny baby. There had been a tree and gifts, but he was aware of little except the warmth of his mother's embrace.

Now, as Julie sat with him on the couch beside the tree, she imagined that he was watching the lights twinkle.



Julie remembered their first Christmas with joy. Their little family now included Joey, and even in the rush of John's travel and caring for a new baby, they had found moments of peace.

Sitting together near the tree, Julie and John imagined all the Christmas days still to come with their son.

Julie had returned to work in May, after six months of maternity leave. The other nurses were glad to have her back and loved hearing stories about Joey.

Still, being a young mother with a husband who traveled was hard—and the demanding schedule of an emergency-room nurse added to the strain.

She loved helping others and knew nursing was her calling. But she longed for more time with Joey and hoped she and John could soon find a way for her to work part time.



Joey's second Christmas was only weeks away. Decorations were up, presents waited beneath the tree, and every morning Diego, their Labrador mix, and Sasha, their white cat, settled close while Julie held Joey and dreamed of Christmas memories not yet made.

John had a few days off and was due home on Christmas Eve. Julie's mother would be away in Milwaukee with Julie's sister, Margie, and her family.

So, this Christmas would belong to just Julie, John, and Joey—a quiet holiday together at home.



Miriam, an elderly widow, lived across the hall. She was kind and always had a smile for everyone. Although she lived alone, visitors often came to her door.

Her gentle spirit made Julie feel comfortable, almost as if Miriam were an aunt. Miriam had watched Joey whenever Julie needed to run an errand or when her mother could not care for him.

At Joey's first Christmas, Miriam had arrived with a baby calendar for him and a plate of cookies for Julie and John.

"I'm Jewish," she told them. "I don't celebrate Christmas as you do, but I know this time brings joy to you—especially with a new baby in the house.

I wish you all well, and many blessings to you."



On Christmas Eve John called. Denver's airport had closed in a major snowstorm. He did not know when he would make it home.

Cars could not get out of the hotel parking lot, the snow kept falling, and forecasts warned that as much as thirty inches might fall before the storm ended.

Right after John's call, Bernice, the nurse leader for the emergency department, phoned.

"Julie, we need you. Too many people are out on leave, and there's been a major accident on the highway.

Is there any way you can come in for a shift—at least through dinner?"

Julie was sad that John might miss Christmas. More than anything, she wanted to spend the next two days at home with Joey.

But the emergency department needed help. She told Bernice she would check on childcare and call right back.



Carrying Joey into the hall, Julie knocked on Miriam's door.

"I know it's short notice, but could you stay with Joey until about six?" she asked, then explained what had happened.

"Of course, dear. Let me get a few things, and I'll come right over."



Minutes later, Miriam was with Joey and Julie was on her way to the hospital.

The emergency room was overwhelmed. Patients waited on gurneys and more seemed to arrive every minute.

Before Julie knew it, six o'clock had come and gone—with no sign of the rush easing.

Miriam assured Julie that she and Joey were fine. She would stay until Julie came home, no matter how late.

That night, Miriam got Joey to sleep, then made a bed for herself on the couch.

On Christmas morning, Julie was finally able to leave the hospital. She had been on duty for nearly eighteen hours, with only a couple of breaks.

It had been a hard night, but the nurses and physicians had done everything they could for the injured.



When Julie opened the apartment door, Miriam was sitting on the floor before the Christmas tree, holding Joey asleep in her arms. Diego and Sasha rested quietly beside them.

Exhausted, Julie felt a wave of relief: all was safe and well at home.

"Merry Christmas, Julie," Miriam said.

Julie gazed at the scene in wonder: Miriam holding the sleeping child, the animals resting peacefully nearby, and the tree glowing softly behind them.

It reminded her of the first Christmas.

All is calm,
all is bright.

Julie's Christmas had not unfolded as she had imagined. John was away, she had worked through the night, and the day began in exhaustion.

Yet as she looked at Miriam and Joey, she understood that this unexpected Christmas held a gift more precious than anything beneath the tree.

Miriam's love for her family was the best Christmas gift of all.

The End



All is calm,
all is bright.

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