

# Exchanging Gifts

By Mark Edgemon

“She’s your mother, you tell her,” Dan said with frustration, while packing the car for a holiday visit to the in-laws.

It was the same thing every Christmas, packing more luggage and presents into his mid-size Nissan Sentra than could possibly fit and preparing to make nice at his wife’s parents home. Last year, he got a pair of socks and a pair of gloves and a sweater that didn’t fit and comments about his go no where job and his need to take off some weight and other types of belittling attacks on his less than perfect life.

“I wish they were dead,” he said to himself, while trying to figure out where to put the baby seat.

“Aren’t you through yet?” his wife Alice asked as she was coming out of the house, holding their 2-year-old baby.

“If I was through, would I still be cursing?” he growled.

“Where’s the baby seat?” she asked.

“If we take the baby seat, something will have to be left behind. He can sit up front between us,” he said as he waved her into the car.

“Shouldn’t I drive? You’ve had way too much to drink!” she said a little concerned.

“One more word and I’ll ram this car into the garage wall. Now, are we ready...fine,” he said determined to get the show on the road.

Dan took off and in minutes pulled onto the main highway as the weather began to make it more difficult to see. Icy streets or not, he was determined to get to her parents house on time. The one thing he did enjoy was the Christmas feast. Afterwards, it was all down hill.

It was snowing hard and the visibility was poor. He looked over at his wife who was asleep, tired from all the aggravation.

As he glanced back to the road, he was stunned to see that the car directly in front of him had come to a complete stop. He had no time to avert a collision due to the accumulating snow and ice patches along the highway. He plowed his car directly into the rear of the car ahead, causing both cars to spin off the embankment.

Minutes later, he came to and tried to wake his wife, who was still drowsy and possibly had a concussion. When she awoke, she began to feel around in the front seat for a few seconds and then cried, "My baby!" now frantically searching for their child. She opened the door beside her and started throwing things outside, trying desperately to find him. When she got out of the car, she saw his crumpled body in the floorboard, bleeding out of his eyes and ears.

She held his lifeless body to her and cried with the most bitter despair Dan had ever heard. He got out of the car and ran over to her, while calling 911 on his cell phone.

The police arrived along with the paramedics and began assisting them as they began to assess the situation.

"The woman in the other car is dead," one of the paramedics said flatly. Dan had been in shock and forgot about the people in the other car.

As the paramedics removed the dead woman from the other car, they found a baby in the seat underneath her body. They began to examine the baby who seemed to be just fine. "The woman's body must have protected the baby during the impact," one of the paramedics said out loud.

While they loaded her body into one of the ambulances, the paramedics noticed the woman was wearing a wig, obviously to conceal her identity. The police officer making out the report said to Dan, "Well, we know the name of the woman in the other car. Her name is Helen Drier. She was a homeless woman living on the streets in the downtown district near the precinct where I work. She was reported to have stolen a car at a shopping mall several hours ago."

The paramedics asked Dan's wife if she would mind holding the dead woman's baby as they drove to the hospital. Alice was still in shock, but nodded her head in agreement.

When they got to the hospital, the doctor on duty pronounced Dan and his wife's baby dead from severe internal injuries. She was still holding the dead woman's baby when the doctor gave them the news. The policeman on duty told them the woman had no relatives that they knew of and the state would send someone out soon to take the dead woman's baby.

Dan's wife clutched the baby and said, "No! You can't have him! This baby is mine!"

The officer said to her, "If you want to file for adoption, that will be fine, but you'll have to follow procedure."

She replied, "Fine, but the baby has to stay somewhere while the paperwork is being filled out and I now apply as his foster mother."

The policeman looked at her, as she was holding the baby close to her and said, "Fine."

The officer called the station to have them wake up the sitting judge. He wanted to help this woman, who obviously was in distress and probably needed this baby over the holidays to help her cope with the loss of her own child. She looked up at Dan and said to him with tears streaming down her face, "God exchanged gifts with us."

Dan couldn't accept that. What he could accept was if he had loved her the way she deserved, none of this would ever have happened. He did love her and he wouldn't deny her this baby. He sat down next to her pulling her close to him, as she held the baby tightly.