

Story 1

'Feeding the Angels' by Keith Miller

A friend of mine seemed so serene in the face of dragons (the problems and pains) of life. "I quit feeding them!" she told me. "I quit nursing the lizards (my doubts and fears) while they're small and it keeps them from becoming those huge, fierce dragons."

I made a conscious effort to do the same, and it helped. But from time to time an emotional lizard would appear that I couldn't seem to avoid feeding. Finally, one sleepless night, I cried out to God, and a memory came into my mind. I was a boy, and my mother was telling me, "What you put in your mind on a regular basis is what you will become in a few years, or even a few months."

So I began to memorize Bible passages that would, if I really lived them, change me into a strong, confident man of God. One was Paul's admonition from Philippians 4:8. I added the Twenty-third Psalm, the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, the Beatitudes and others.

Yesterday someone in our prayer group asked me, "What are you feeding the lizards these days?"

I smiled and said, "You'll never believe it, but the 'food' I'm putting in my mind now is the Word of God."

"Do the lizards eat it?"

"Gosh, no, they *hate* it."

My friend smiled and asked, "Then to whom are you feeding the Word?"

"Um, "I said, thinking about that, "I guess I'm feeding the angels God sent to free me from my fears."

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Story 2

'Bless Them That Curse You' by Louise Majors

During the summer, before our children went off to elementary school, I started looking for a job. I pounded the pavement unsuccessfully for weeks. Then I answered an ad placed in the *Los Angeles Times* by the California Institute of Technology.

The opening turned out to be for an accounting clerk at the Cooperative Wind Tunnel facility, which tested aircraft parts for strength and wind resistance. Carl Jorgensen, who headed the finance department, was a matter-of-fact man who peered kindly through his black-rimmed eyeglasses and said, "Louise, you have excellent qualification. If you are willing to start at minimum wage, a dollar and nineteen cents an hour, you can begin next Monday."

I gulped. In my previous job, before I took years off to rear our children to school age, I'd made in a day almost as much as he was offering for a week. But I'd already been turned down for six other jobs. "Thank you, Mr. Jorgensen," I replied. "I want the job very much."

Come Monday morning I went directly to Carl Jorgensen's office. His cheeriness put me at ease, and I followed him as he introduced me to the office staff. "Everyone here goes by first names," he said. He stopped at the first desk. "Hildur is our payroll clerk. Hildur, this is Louise, our new accounting clerk."

I smiled, "I'm glad to meet you Hildur."

She was grandmotherly with soft, wavy white hair, rimless eyeglasses, smooth fair complexion-pleasant looking. She looked me up and down, then her expression changed. Getting up, she railed, "We don't need an accounting clerk. I don't know why you were hired!" She slammed shut the record book she'd been posting, snatched up her purse and stomped out the door.

Everyone's mouth dropped open. I stood stupefied, feeling the blood surge to my neck and face. This was awful!

Carl Jorgensen was quick to regain his composure and started more introductions: "Bernice, Manna and Esther, the last desk on the right, are members of the steno pool. Joy is our mail clerk and relief switchboard-operator. Please welcome Louise."

It didn't take long to be welcomed. The "girls" (as even we called ourselves back in the forties and fifties) were very kind and helpful, and they asked me to have lunch with them later.

I'd just returned from Carl's office with my first assignment when Hildur appeared. She ignored everyone, slammed drawers, and was testy on the telephone and to people stopping at her desk. There was no conversation in the office until shortly before noon.

"Did you bring your lunch today, Hildur?" Bernice asked.

Hildur looked up warily. "Is she going to lunch with you?"

"Yes"

"I'm working." Hildur snapped.

I liked the "girls"; they were relaxed and friendly. But I was troubled by Hildur. On the way back to the office I mentioned I was going to bring my lunch and study in my car, starting tomorrow. I didn't want to be the reason for Hildur not eating with the others. She would soften up after a bit, I reckoned.

Meantime, I was enjoying the bustle of the Wind Tunnel facility – the Tunnel" as we called it. Four or five times a day the warning bells would go off, and we'd hear the high whine of the turbines that generated the air flow in the test chamber. I loved the family atmosphere in the halls

and offices. No matter whether you were greeting a hard hat or a world-famous scientist, it was “Hi, Ted” or “Hi, Fred,” with a genuine friendliness and a shared sense of mission.

Yet Hildur didn’t mellow. Weeks passed, and the tension only worsened. When I was out of the office, the other women said Hildur was congenial and talkative. The minute I walked in, she fell glaringly silent. Each morning she would ignore my cheery greeting.

I searched the Bible and ended up by pasting my mother’s favorite Scripture in my middle desk drawer. As Hildur rebuffed each of my advances, I referred to it: “Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you” (Matthew 5:44, KJV). I nearly wore out that drawer as the weeks went by.

A couple of months passed. One of the women I’d come to know in the next office was retiring. We all chipped in for a little afternoon send-off party that I looked forward to. Maybe I could get an opportunity to talk with Hildur in this kind of a setting.

I was just getting ready to go when Bernice called over to Hildur, “Aren’t you going to the party?”

Hildur glared over at me, then at Bernice. “Is she going?”

“Well, of course,” Bernice said, “we’re all going.”

“Then I’m not.”

I gritted my teeth and then said as evenly as I could, “Oh Bernice, you all go on without me. I’ve some catching up to do. Maybe I’ll come in later.”

But after they’d gone, I brooded. I pulled open my drawer, and there was the message. “Do good to them that hate you,” I read aloud. Then I said, “Lord, You know I’m doing that. My question is: How long must this go on?”

As if by answer, I recalled a scene of twenty years before, when I’d had a falling-out with an adolescent friend. I was back in Mother’s kitchen and she was telling me, “Seventy times seven, that’s how often Jesus told us to forgive. Remember, Louise, the only way to destroy an enemy is to make a friend of him.”

I shut my drawer gently. “Thank You, Lord,” I whispered.

A couple of months later, on a windy March day, we had a torrential rainstorm. Creeping along in our old green Pontiac coupe on my way home, windshield wipers batting furiously, I spotted Hildur standing at a bus stop, huddled under an umbrella. I stopped and flipped open the passenger door.

As kindly and as firmly as I could, I said, “Hildur, get in.” She hesitated a second and then lowered her umbrella and scrambled in. Water dripped from her hair and she looked soaked through. I turned up the heat. “Hildur, please give me directions as we go,” I asked.

Except for directions, she was silent all the way to her apartment in East Pasadena. Before dropping her off, I asked her if there was anything I could do. She said, “No, but thank you very much.”

After I had watched her disappear into her apartment, I exulted, “Well, praise the Lord, at least she talked to me!” All the way home I felt elated, singing the old hymn “Love Lifted Me.” Hildur may not have changed, but at last I felt better.

The next morning was bright, crisp and clear. “Good morning, Hildur!” I said when I got to the office.

“Good morning, Louise,” Hildur said with a shy smile. The whole office seemed to give a collective sigh of relief. The harmony was instant; it was as if someone had let the sunshine and singing birds right into the office.

That Friday Hildur and I went out to lunch. She admitted her job was her love, and that she had felt threatened when I was hired. She thought management intended to replace her with me. But over lunch we became friends.

On the way home from work I stopped in Pasadena, had my hair cut and styled, bought a geranium-red dress, patent leather shoes with a pocketbook that matched, and a nifty wide-brimmed straw hat. Mac and the kids went into shock when the “new me” walked in that night. “Wow,” Mac said, “I thought your job was getting you down!”

“That was last week,” I said. “Now it’s getting me up!”

And it stayed that way. Making a friend of Hildur was one of the hardest things I ever did, yet one of the most rewarding. It was wonderful to have her as a friend, and I have Jesus to thank for that.

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