



LOVE CAN WARM THE COLDEST HEART

*Ephesians 4:32: (ESV): Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Angels of Forgiveness



I felt as if I had been slapped. I gaped in horror as I stared at the empty storage room and tried to comprehend my mother-in-law's words, “. . . and we even made \$200!” She had sold all my worldly possessions without my permission. She was trying to be kind, but in doing so, she plowed a cavernous furrow through the garden of our friendship. I knew it would never bloom again.

Our family had just returned home after serving as missionaries for four years in Russia. We still hadn't found a place to live, and my mother-in-law wanted to help by clearing out room for us in her unfinished basement—in the space our hundred boxes of lifetime treasures once occupied. She'd sold everything from hand-knit sweaters to homemade quilts. Only a forlorn crate of John Denver records and a bag of used mittens remained.

The money she handed me from the proceeds of the sale felt like blood money. I had waited for four years to unwrap my wedding china, greet my books and knick-knacks, and slip back into my fine dresses. I couldn't believe I had put so much value on possessions, but I had, and now I was stripped.

Then I discovered she'd sold my Christmas ornaments. Every year since childhood my mother had given me a special gift at Christmas, a

new and unique tree decoration that symbolized my life for that year, as well as her love for me. The box of heirloom ornaments I had so carefully packed had been sold for a dollar; my memories traded for the price of two cheeseburgers.

A ball of anger swelled in my heart. As I curled in my bed, sobbing out my grief, the ball gained momentum and became an avalanche, burying any tendril of love I had left for the mother of my husband.

Christmas loomed close and everywhere I saw beautiful, glittering Christmas trees. My tree was naked, its arms bare against the white lights. Where was the golden star with my name etched on it, or my tiny porcelain piano? How could she have done this? I felt entombed by my anger.

Sometime in January I realized I had missed the joy that came with the advent season. It couldn't penetrate my icy heart. I could barely look at my mother-in-law, despite the fact she begged my forgiveness.

"I didn't know how much this would hurt you," she said, weeping. "I was just trying to help."

I turned a stone heart to her plea. Frost laced the edges of our conversations and although I said the words, "I forgive you," my soul was an iceberg and I knew I had not.

In the past, my mother-in-law had been my greatest supporter, encouraging me, helping me pack, babysitting, and stuffing thousands of newsletters. She had cried with me, prayed for me, and tolerated me living in her home. I missed her and knew that if I wanted warmth to reenter my heart, I had to forgive her. But nothing could ease the ache of losing my memories. I avoided her and resolved to live with the pain.

When we moved away in February, I slammed the door on our relationship and didn't talk to her again.

Three days before the following Christmas, a parcel arrived at our front door, my name etched on the front. Mystified, I opened it. Then, surrounded by my family's astonished gasps, I unwrapped, one by one, a collection of angel ornaments. From bears with wings and halos to gilded crystal angels holding trumpets, I hung a choir of heavenly hosts on my tree. Finally, I sank into the sofa as my children examined the decorations, *oohing* and *aahing*.

“Who’s it from?” my husband asked. I retrieved the box, dug through the tissue, and unearthed a small card. *Merry Christmas—Love, Mom* was scrawled out in my mother-in-law’s script. Tears burned my

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eyes and, as I let them free, my icy tomb of anger began to melt. My mother-in-law was not able to retrieve the past she had so carelessly discarded, but she was hoping to build a future, our future. And it would start with these angels, proclaiming the love and forgiveness that entered our world. If God could forgive me, who stole His Son’s life, certainly I could forgive my mother-in-law for stealing my . . . *stuff*.

Easter arrived and with it forgiveness finally flowered in my heart. We descended upon the in-laws for a visit and I wrapped my husband’s mother in a teary embrace. I had lost the little stuffed bunnies my grandmother had knit for me, but I had gained something better—the fragrance of forgiveness, and the everlasting hope that love can warm the coldest heart.