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 Pacific Press®
Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho | www.pacificpress.com

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The Angels Lifted Their Car

by C. Mervyn Maxwell

Every foot the car moved forward seemed to bring the river another inch higher. Already water swirled dangerously near the engine, and some was leaking in through the doors. Everyone inside sat stiff and tense. If water entered the exhaust pipe, the engine would stall, and the car would have to be abandoned in the middle of the stream.

It all happened while Dad Larsen and his family were driving through the San Bernardino Mountains. Their Plymouth was pulling them quite faithfully, if not quite smoothly, over the rough mountain roads when it brought them to the brink of a rushing mountain stream. There was no bridge in sight. There was only a “ford,” and the travelers were expected to drive through.

They stopped their car at the bank to survey the situation. The water was running fast and wide but apparently not too deep. At least, from the shore, it didn’t seem too deep. Or at least to Dad Larsen’s boy, it didn’t seem too deep.

Dad, on the other hand, had a few misgivings. He

thought the river had more water in it than usual. Cars could cross it at certain times of the year, he knew, but perhaps there were times when they couldn't.

But his boy said, "It'll be all right. We can make it."

Even if the water is not too deep, he thought, it is flowing mighty fast, which could make steering quite a problem, especially if the bottom is rough.

But his boy said, "We can make it easy, Dad."

What about that waterfall a few feet downriver from the ford? It was hardly more than a cataract, but if the river current should force the car down to it, it would surely be enough to turn the car over on its side. Then the river would pour into it and ruin it.

But his boy said, "Dad, don't worry so."

Yet suppose the water were just deep enough that it came up to the exhaust pipe and stalled the engine?

"Oh, Dad," said his son, "let's go!"

Only Dad Larsen sensed how dangerous it really was. But perhaps because he simply had to go on with the trip or perhaps because he wasn't quite sure or perhaps because his boy talked so much, Dad finally said, "All right, Son, we'll try it."

His boy climbed onto the hood to act as pilot. Dad took his place in the driver's seat. The engine was started, and slowly, cautiously, the front wheels inched into the water. They were on their way.

And now the car was fully in the ford, and the ford of the river tugged at the wheels, doing its best to turn them down to the waterfall. They hit rocks the water had laid down, and the steering wheel spun wildly in the driver's hands.

The engine was in low gear, with the clutch only partly engaged. The car shook and roared. The family shouted their alarms.

“Hey, be careful! Don’t try to go so fast.”

“I don’t believe we ought to have tried it. Why don’t we turn around and go back?”

But from out on the hood came a voice: “Oh, don’t worry so. We’ll soon be across.”

How could they keep from worrying when every foot the car moved forward seemed to bring the river another inch higher? Already water swirled dangerously near the engine, and some leaked in through the doors. Would the water run down the exhaust pipe? Would the car stall out here in the middle of the river?

They were not left long in doubt. All at once the exhaust burbled out the back like a motorboat, the engine choked and spluttered, and silence settled down over the stream.

All that broke the stillness was the steady rush of water as it swept past the wheels and over the nearby falls. And even now, the car was moving, bit by bit, down toward the waterfall.

What could be done? Dad pushed the starter pedal, but of course, that did no good. They were alone, away out in the mountains. The nearest tow truck was hours away, and the chances of another car coming in time were too remote to be considered.

The only solution was to lift the back of the car and hold it above the water until they could get across—but who could do a thing like that? The river was too wide, the water was too deep, and the car was too heavy. It was quite out of the question.

But it was the only way out.

And something had to be done fast, before the river forced the car over the falls.

And so Dad Larsen did what every one of you would have done. He asked God for help. “O Lord,” he prayed,

“You can do anything. Please help us now.”

And then a wonderful thing happened. It is almost unbelievable, but I know it is quite true. Dad Larsen told me the story himself and answered my questions about it.

Immediately, right then, just as soon as he had prayed, the family felt a strange, mysterious motion at the back of the car. It began to lift up, up, up until the exhaust pipe cleared the water!

There were three people in the car and one on the hood when it happened, and they all felt it. The boy didn't even know his dad had prayed, but he knew when the answer came. The car wasn't lifted clean out of the river. The rear wheels were left on the ground to make traction, and the springs were stretched so the exhaust pipe could clear.

Even more than that, before they could get the engine started, the car began to move forward by itself, as if hastened onward by an unseen hand!

Once more Dad tried the starter, and this time, with many a sputter and a gurgle, the engine came alive. He slipped it wonderingly into gear and added its power to that of the helpers from above.

The river current still wrestled with the wheels just as furiously, the river bottom was still just as rough, and the water whirling past the wheels was just as deep (or deeper) as it had been before, but now the car kept moving till at last it reached the other shore.

What a time of rejoicing they had when they were safe again! How grateful they were for the helpfulness of the angels! But the best part of the story as far as that family is concerned is this: That son had never wanted to believe in God. But from that day forward, he began to realize that there is a God in heaven who answers His faithful children's prayers.

The Monkey God Failed

by Kelsey Van Kipp

Nona Lakshmi lay sick with a high fever. She stayed on a pile of filthy rags in one corner of the dirty hut that was her home on the island of Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean.

Grandmother had brewed medicine from the bark of the blue gum tree, but it didn't make the little sufferer feel any better. The old woman had gathered leeches from the grass that grew thickly in the stagnant water in the evil-smelling drains beside the hut. She had let the leeches suck blood from the little girl's body, but still the child felt no better.

Smoke from an open fire lingered in the straw-thatched hut, for there was no chimney, only a hole in the center of the roof. Across the floor, Nona could see her grandmother throwing herself down before a little brass monkey god. It was tied to one of the poles that held up the roof. In front of the monkey god sat a saucer of *ghee* (melted butter) as an offering. Beside it was a small pot of coconut oil with a lighted wick.

Nona trembled and shook with chills when her father

came in with the cow and goats. It was time for his evening meal of rice and curry, for darkness had come with its usual suddenness. In their eagerness to find food, the rats ran over the little girl's body. Grandmother threw some food outdoors for them, for she believed that feeding the rats would ward off the plague.

Later in the evening, several neighbors and friends dropped in to help Grandmother do *puja* (prayers) to the gods for Nona. One woman brought a Ganesha, a good-luck god, made of mud that she had bought in the marketplace that day. It had a man's body and an elephant's head as well as four arms and very short legs tucked around a fat stomach. Grandmother placed it on a block of wood below the monkey god, and along the top, she scattered dried peas and rice. Then the women and children knelt with their faces to the ground while a man called on the gods to hear and take away the evil spirits from the home.

Little Nona tossed and moaned the night through. When the sun came up, she was so weak she could not even lift her hand. Grandmother went to the store to get something tempting for her to eat, but Nona could not swallow even milk. The fever was burning up her body.

Grandmother was frantic. She had tried all the things she knew, but none had helped. The monkey god had failed. There remained only one desperate chance.

At the store, someone had told her of a foreign doctor in Ambalangoda village six miles away who had powerful medicine. The old woman decided that Nona must be carried to him. She had no money to pay for moving her granddaughter, but she must find a way.

That's how it happened that just after sunset the same day, a little old woman pushing a wooden-wheeled cart very

much like a wheelbarrow came to the mission dispensary. In that wheelbarrow lay tiny Nona Lakshmi, very near death.

The doctor was kind, but he feared it was too late for his medicine to take effect. The beds were all filled at the dispensary, but to start back home so late was out of the question. So the doctor gave Nona some medicine anyway, and the old woman slept on the cement porch beside the rude cart in which the tiny sufferer lay.

With the dawn and the bustle of the new day, Grandmother rose to peer into the cart. Nona opened her brown eyes.

“Please, a drink, Grandmother,” she said.

Grandmother was overjoyed. She ran for a gourd of water at the well. A little later, when the doctor came out to see his small patient, he found her much better and the fever going down.

Grandmother dropped to her knees at his feet, saying, “Your God is more powerful than our gods.”

“That is so,” he answered, “because our God is a God of love.”

Reaching down to take one of her calloused, bony hands, he helped the old woman to her feet. He glanced down at the cart and thought of the long, weary miles she had pushed the wheelbarrow.

“You can understand love,” he said kindly. “It was only love that saved your little granddaughter’s life. Our God loves you even more than you love Nona.”

The doctor could see that she understood what he was trying to tell her by the childlike expression of wonder on her wrinkled face. The old woman stood for a moment looking after the doctor when he had gone. Through her mind came a procession of the gods she knew: Shiva, the dancer

with a bad reputation; Ganesha, the huntsman's son whose beard was cut off and replaced with the beard of an elephant; the devil spirits, which might come in an open door if a careless mother had not drawn a magic charm on the ground before the opening; Kali, like little children; the Juggernaut Car, under whose wheels many babies had died.

A God of love—what a wonderful thing it would be to have this God for her very own. Now her determination focused on finding out more about this God who was not only stronger but kinder than those she had known. She was ready to meet the true God.