

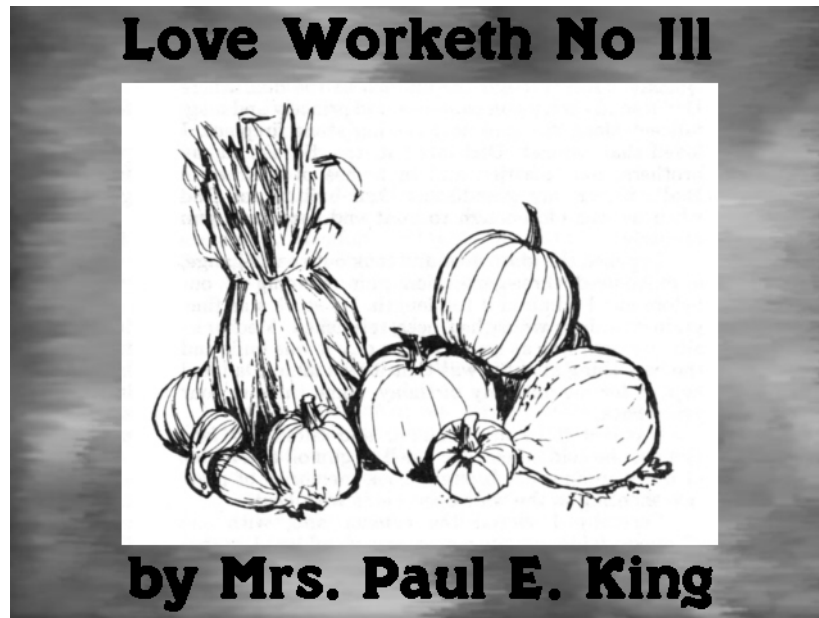
Copyright 2001 By Lucille King
All Rights Reserved and Duplication
Of This Publication Is Forbidden,
Except For Personal Use

* * * * *

Digital Edition 11/09/05
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * *

The Sunday School Beacon
October 7, 1984



LOVE WORKETH NO ILL
By Mrs. Paul E. King

It's a good thing we can't foresee the future, nor even what a day will bring forth. Had I known what this day would bring my way, I may have changed my plans and remained home by the toasty-warm fire in the fireplace. But I didn't know; and God, who both sees and ordains what comes our way and allows it to come by His permissive, all-wise will, surely had everything timed to perfection for me. For someone else, too.

I finished the milking before dawn broke in the eastern sky. The stars hung like silver pendants on their curtain of night as I scrubbed the milk pails in the milk house and turned them upside down for self drying. Then I headed for the house and an early, self-prepared breakfast.

Mother came downstairs just as I finished dragging the last golden-brown pancake through a deliciously-sweet concoction of melted butter and hot maple syrup . . . from the trees in Dad's woods. To the very last drop of sticky goodness, I cleaned my plate. Clean-clean. Mother's "waste not, want not" philosophical speech would have been superfluous just then.

"You're up early, Bryan," she said, shaking the ashes out of the grate and adding several lengths of wood into the stove's mouth. "Something important to do, huh?"

I took my plate and silverware to the sink and washed them as I replied, "Kinda. Hunting season's almost here. I'd like to do a bit of grouse hunting this year, God willing. Thought I'd go to the woods and do a little snooping. I know where several feed pretty regularly, but I'd like to locate a few more. Burt Finnegan told me his dad's been putting feed out for over a year for a flock of them. He spreads the feed at the edge of the woods that joins his land. They come down to feed every day of the colder weather. Burt says it's something else to watch them. They're a beautiful bird."

Mom eyed me a bit suspiciously before she said real casual-like, "You think you'll kill one, huh?"

I swallowed, knowing what she meant. Then I switched the subject to the barn. "Snowball calved during the night," I told her. "She has a beautiful calf. I named her Apricot; she looks just like a little golden-brown apricot, Mom. The milking's all done and so is the feeding. I wanted to get up to the woods as soon after daylight as possible. Sort of scout around."

"The fresh air will do you good, Bryan," Mom said, slicing potatoes into sizzling-hot bacon grease in readiness for Dad's breakfast when he came downstairs.

I walked out to the porch and noticed the stars had faded with the dawn and disappeared with the night. Quickly I ran through the kitchen to the den,

where Dad's solid cherry gun cabinet stood princely and magnificent along the wall near the big stone fireplace. I loved that cabinet; Dad loved it, too. So did all my brothers, now married and in homes of their own. Dad's father, my grandfather, had built it for Dad when he was old enough to hunt and care for a gun properly.

I opened the glass door and took out the 20-gauge, a much-used three-generation gun. Holding it out before me, I admired it full length. Its stock was fine-grained walnut which had been refinished. Mechanically, the gun was as sound as the day it was built and the best thing about it was that it was mine. Dad had kept it for me until my birthday, some three or four years back.

I pulled it to my shoulder and tilted my face against the cold stock. The smell of gun oil and a hint of burnt gunpowder brought back memories of practice shooting in the wide-open fields with Dad.

Carefully I closed the cabinet and, with the 20-gauge lying gently across my shoulder, I stared through the window. My gaze wandered over the corn stubble projecting above the snow-covered fields, shifted beyond to the birch stand white against the dark mountains in the background, and followed the contour of the nearest mountain top to The Gap and last year's grouse season.

Dad thought I should try it -- hunting grouse with him, that is. Doing anything with Dad was sheer ecstasy and pure delight for me. So I went. Mr. Pibb went too. He's our super springer with a keen nose for grouse.

We climbed the mountain, the three of us, then descended into The Gap. Mr. Pibb was working ahead beneath low-hanging hemlocks heavy with snow -- he seemed to enjoy just being out there. The grouse . . . a beautiful . . . pair came out beneath the hemlock, their wings thundering, snow falling on the forest floor from the flush.

I brought my gun up but that was all. I couldn't fire. I just couldn't bring myself to kill anything so beautiful and magnificent. I recalled the myriad times I had stood, statue-like and unmoving in their domain, listening with beating heart to the thunderous drumming of the cock's wings . . . his mating signal . . . and seeing the proud, regal bearing as he alighted from his stump-throne and disappeared beneath the branches of low-growing huckleberries

or some other bush that grew profusely beneath the tall, stately trees on the forest floor.

Dad had stood and looked at me but said nothing.

"Why didn't you shoot, Dad?" I finally managed to ask.

Smiling, he said simply, "Perhaps for the same reason you couldn't, Son. They're a magnificent bird, aren't they, Bryan?"

All choked up, I said, soft-like and hoarse, "Magnificent, Dad! That's why Genesis says what it does, about everything that God made being very good."

We walked slowly through the mountain toward . . . home, Mr. Pibb seeming to cast reproachful glances our way every little bit as though he couldn't possibly understand either of us. Nor forgive us for allowing two such fine specimens to escape after his noble and beautiful way of working and flushing was climaxed.

"You taking the gun, Bryan?"

Mom's voice startled me, brought me out of my fond day-dreaming. My remembering.

"Thought I may," I answered. "Want to do some practicing. I'm afraid I'm a bit 'rusty'; not much time for practicing with the super-good bumper crops God gave us this year."

Mom smiled. "Yes, the Lord blessed scripturally: 'Good measure, shaken together, pressed down and running over,' " she said. "Now run along and enjoy yourself; Saturday comes only once every week."

I laughed then hurried outside, Mr. Pibb begging to go along. "Not today, old pal," I said, ruffling the fur on his neck and patting his head. "Today's going to be a quiet day for me; a sort of 'scouting' day." Turning, I raced into the house and placed the prized keepsake back into the gun cabinet. It wouldn't be quiet, not with practice shooting, I told myself.

I took long, easy strides across the fields and was soon in the mountain. How I did love the mountains: the dark mysteriousness of their interior; the enormity of their height; the seeming endless line of their length; their strength and durability; their virility and life.

Everything was so beautiful. The forest was fresh with snow from yesterday's snowfall. I heard my every footstep packing the snow beneath my feet and the soft soothing twittering of forest birds. Below me came the intermittent sound of the brook in the hollow. And then I heard the discharge of a gun and somebody yelling for help. It fell like a shroud over the peaceful atmosphere; like a bomb over the serenity of the silence and the strength of the mountains.

"Help! He-lp! Please, somebody, help me!"

The scream was blood curdling. Then recognition filled my senses, my brain. That voice belonged to none other than Gerald Willett. Sure as my name was Bryan Hopperman, that was wild, dangerous, lawless Gerald.

"He-lp! Pl-e-ase! "

Gerald the lawless, the fearless: the one who stole my best pocket knife at school and dared me to get it back; the one who lied to my chemistry teacher, declaring that I, not he, broke that set of test tubes; the one who stole my theme and made it his by taking my name off and replacing it with his. He was needing help now.

Like one of the fleet-footed deer of the mountains, I raced up, up, pausing only long enough to make sure that I was going in the right direction. The call was closer now; the plea for help, pitiful, imploring. Begging even.

"Coming," I answered, with the same urgency in my voice as his. And then I found him. "What'd you do?" I asked, kneeling in the snow beside him. "What happened, Gerald?"

"I . . . I . . . oh, Bryan, forgive me. Please forgive me for lying about you and for stealing from you. I may not recover from this and I . . . I can't die and meet God with this weighing on my conscience as heavily as this mountain."

"You're forgiven, Gerald; freely and fully forgiven. But tell me, what happened? You're a mess. I mean, well . . . did you break your leg, or . . .?"

"I was . . . poaching. As usual. Oh, please let me confess it all. Maybe that way I can face God without this horrible condemnation on my heart."

"Why not tell Him you're a wretched sinner, Gerald, and that you want Him to wash your sins away in His Blood? He's been-waiting for a long time to hear you say this; waiting to hear you ask Him to come into your heart. The guilt of sin, and the heavy load, will go when you become converted . . . forgiven."

"Anything you say, Bryan. I can't die and meet God with all these sins hanging over me. Oh may God have mercy on me and on my soul."

"He will, Gerald; call upon Him. Then I'll see what I can do to get you down off this mountain and to a hospital," I said.

With a groan, Gerald's story came out. He'd been stalking a deer . . . an 8-pointer. He stumbled into a hole and fell, breaking his leg. And sustaining numerous other injuries, I was sure. Fortunately, when the gun discharged, the bullet went into the air. It could have been another story, I mused silently, recalling the freak accident that took the life of a friend of mine.

"Look Bryan," Gerald cried as I finished putting his leg in a make-shift splint and heaved him up on my shoulder, "I . . . I'm not worthy of your kindness. I was mean and hateful and nasty to you. Put me down and let me die; I don't deserve your kindness."

"I didn't deserve God's kindness either," I said, trying to conserve as much strength as possible for the long trek down the mountain's side. "God loved me and gave His Son to die for me when I was unlovable and hateful. I didn't deserve His love; but I reached out, confessed and forsook my sins, and by faith in the Son of God, I was born again. Made new in Christ. You can experience the same thing, Gerald," I said as I plodded downward with my burden.

Both Gerald and I were in our senior year of schooling at Mountain View High. He was ruggedly handsome and broad-shouldered, a typical

athletic specimen. But there the "typical" part ended. He was one-of-a kind (in our area at least) in defying and breaking laws and in lying and stealing.

"This is hard on you, Bryan," Gerald said after a long period of silence in which I prayed that he'd surrender fully to Christ and get saved.

"I'm managing well," I said, picking my way carefully downward. "I'm only sorry it's such a bumpy 'ride' for you. It must pain your leg dreadfully."

Gerald fell silent again. I was thankful. I needed to conserve my waning strength. I was beginning to feel the added weight I was carrying -- really feel it. I prayed for renewed strength, knowing that if I ever put Gerald down I'd not be able to get him back up again.

On and on I plodded, downward ever downward emerging finally at the base of the mountain that skirted our back-forty. Would I ever be able to make it across the fields? I wondered, panting now beneath my load. And then I saw Dad. He saw me. Us. He was spreading corn fodder in one of the fields for the cattle.

Guiding the team of horses, he came toward us. The wagon bed was perfect for Gerald. With Dad's help, we lowered him down onto a bit of remaining fodder then headed for the house. Dad heard the details of the happening as the wagon jounced across the frozen fields, commending and complimenting me for the way I'd treated Gerald and for all the help I'd given him.

"It came natural, Dad," I said in a low-muffled tone of voice. "God's imparted love, you know. 'Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.' "

"I know, Bryan. I know. This is only one of the many beautiful aspects of a holy heart. Well, here we are. Now to get a call through to the Willetts"

Long after Gerald was taken to the hospital by his parents I sat by the fireplace, watching the burning hickory log and the smoke draw up the chimney. My body ached, to be sure, and my back felt like it had taken a beating. But my heart felt light as a feather over something Gerald kept repeating to me while they were putting him in the car. "Forgiven! Forgiven!"

he exclaimed, clinging weakly to my hand. "Forgiven! Saved! Thanks, Bryan. Thanks much."

A warm drowsiness enfolded me. I closed my eyes.