A TIME FOR BEGINNING

by Mrs. Paul E. King

Now why did his father send him up here alone? Marc wondered. And so early, too? Why couldn't he have remained at home until his father and he could make the trip together? It would have been less expensive had they driven up in only one car. As things now stood, there would be two cars for two people who lived together beneath the same roof back in the small village.
Marc brought his old but good-running car to a halt as near to the cabin as he could get it. Snow, knee-deep, blocked most of the area. What a mess! he thought, as he sat and stared through the car's windshield at the sea of white which was all around him. He felt like backing out of the snow-covered road, turning around, and heading back home. He didn't relish the thought of spending three days alone in the cabin. Especially when he knew that, as easily as not, he could well be snowbound here for many days.

The meteorologists in this particular mountain had eliminated the word "flurries" from their vocabularies, realizing there just was no in-between up here where the cabin stood. When it came to snow, it either blanketed the area in layers which piled one upon another until the porch steps were smothered and snow pushed up against the doors and windows, or it didn't snow at all, permitting a sky show which could be as vast and as brilliant as a sea of polished crystal.

Marc sat staring out the window, slumping slightly over the steering wheel, debating what to do. The cabin was well-stocked with everything he'd need, even down to the wood for the stove and extra kerosene for the lamps. An adjoining shed furnished the storage space for these. Of canned foods, there was no lack. A well-insulated storage room down a crawl space beneath the cabin held shelf upon shelf of both store-bought and home-canned vegetables, jellies, fruits, soups, meats, nuts, peanut butter, and even popcorn for popping over the open fireplace in the sitting room.

He sat until he felt himself getting stiff and cold, not sure at all that he wanted to stay. Then, seeing snowflakes dusting down from the skies, he knew he had no choice in what to do or not do. He'd get caught in the storm, possibly stuck in the drifts, and he could well freeze to death if he started down off the mountain.

Opening the car door, and grabbing an armload of grocery sacks filled with bread, potatoes, cheese, milk, oleo, crackers, meat, and other necessary things for the stay, Marc plowed through the snow to the door. Slipping the key into the lock, he turned it and the door swung open.

It was cold inside. But, then, he knew that it would be. So, setting the groceries on the kitchen table, he unlocked the door that led out into the shed and brought in armloads of the dry wood and a bit of kindling chips. In a short
time he had a blazing fire going in the fireplace. It drove out the gloom and chased the cold from the cabin in leaping flames of warmth.

He finished unloading the car, then set about getting himself something to eat. A sandwich would do, he decided, and a glass of milk, until he could make his favorite stew. It was a dish which his father had taught him how to prepare years ago when he had first brought him up to the cabin, and now, it was one of his favorite meals, if not the favorite.

By the time he had the quick snack eaten and the stew simmering on top of the stove, an early darkness was creeping over the ridge of the mountain which by now was totally obscured by the blinding, driving snow. He was suddenly thankful that he had used his better judgment and had not attempted to drive back home in the snow storm. Furthermore, his father would have been disappointed had he done so. It had seemed so important to his dad that he be alone these few days.

The warmth from the fire in the fireplace, and that in the small wood-burning kitchen stove, made Marc drowsy. He stood for a long while in front of the window, watching the wind as it blew and tossed the powdery snow every which way, piling it in high mounds around the rhododendron and the hemlocks and all but burying his car beneath it. Then he pulled the heavy oak rocker close to the fireplace, propped his feet on an old hassock, leaned back in the chair, and shut his eyes. The time was his own. No need for hurry, and positively none for schedule. He’d be locked in tight for days and he knew it.

The thought was almost oppressive to Marc, who felt more alone than he could remember ever having felt. If only his father were here with him so he’d have someone with whom to converse!

The warmth from the burning logs settled over him like a blanket and he was soon asleep, while the snow outside piled up higher and higher.

It was the dream that awakened him. So frightening and mysterious was it that he jumped to his feet with a start and began pacing back and forth across the room. That it had significance and was meant specifically for him, he had no doubt. Truth of the matter was, the fact that he knew that it was meant for him was all the more troubling. It was as though a voice from somewhere deep within his being was pleading with him to have swift obedience and pay heed to the dream.
He hurried into the small kitchen and stirred the simmering, savory-smelling stew before putting more firewood into the stove's mouth. Then he went back into the combination sitting-bedroom, tossed another log into the fireplace, watched it ignite into blue-orange flames, and stood, staring in contemplative, troubled thought, watching tile flames leap high and disappear up the chimney.

He was a mere eighteen years old, yet the life he had lived in sin the past two years was as though he were a much older man. Not that sin was a respecter of age: Not at all. But when he turned his back on the Lord two years ago and backslid, he transgressed the laws of God and committed sins of such a nature that he would never have believed it possible had someone told him this before he went back on God and turned traitor to all that was righteous, holy, and upright. The frightening thing was that, once he got started in the sinning business it was easy for him to commit one sin after another, each taking him farther and farther down, and plunging him deeper and deeper into the death-gripping, life-robbing, suffocating quicksand.

He had left home when his kind but firm father had ordered that either he do a total about-face and change, or he must leave the home nest. And, belligerent, defiant and rebellious, he had marched proudly through the door into the world of his choosing: the world of long hair, open, unbuttoned-to-the-waist shirts, skin-tight jeans, vulgar and profane language, immorality, and sin.

For two years, he had been like the prodigal son in the Bible, living even lower than the hogs which the prodigal had fed, and thinking that he was having a good time and that the world owed him a living. Then his buddy had gotten weary of the transient life and, declaring that it was even less satisfying and gratifying than being at home was, he had "pulled stakes," hitched a ride across country to his parents' home, and left Marc to fend for himself.

He had done a great deal of thinking after Curt left for home. It shook him forcibly. Trying to make ends meet on his meager earnings was no small thing; especially so since he was just another school drop-out. Through it all, he had managed to keep his old car, and one day when he too became tired of drifting and running, he had tossed his few belongings into the cavernous trunk of the old car and started for home. The trip was trying, long, and tiring.
Each night found him huddled inside the car on the back seat . . . his bed . . . and each morning found him stiff and chilled and angry at the world.

The thought of a good bed and a bountiful breakfast each morning gave added impetus to the foot pressing the accelerator of the car. He had even gone into a barber shop and had his hair cut like a man, then stopped by a store and bought several pair of conservative-cut trousers, knowing this was a requisite for entry back into the home nest.

When Marc had knocked on the door that night, and his father had opened and seen that his orders were carried out so far as the standard of hair, trousers and buttoned shirt was concerned, he had welcomed him back with tears of joy. His mother also. That was two weeks ago. And now, here he was, alone in the cabin, and snow-bound too, he was sure. All because his father had asked him to come up early.

Thinking back two years, Marc recalled how grown up he had felt when his father had allowed him the privilege (as he had considered it then) of spending several days alone in the cabin. But it was different now. He had too much time to think before his father would join him for several days. This was a thing they frequently did, for the mere pleasure of father-son togetherness, exploring, fishing in the roaring stream near the back of the cabin, hiking, or just sitting inside, relaxed, locked in by snow and ice.

Marc's thoughts raced to his father and his radical heart-change three years ago. It seemed unbelievable, almost, the way his dad had changed. And all because of a paper tract which someone had given to him. He had read and re-read the message written on the yellow colored paper until his heart could stand no more. Humbling himself, he had repented and confessed his sins and found the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Marc and his mother followed suit. For almost a full year, he had loved the Lord and was joyously happy serving Him. Then the Stewards moved into the empty house next door, and Riff began making sport of him and his "Puritan lifestyle" (Riff's words).

Marc stared into the blazing, leaping flames. He was a fool for having succumbed to Riff's taunting and his fun-making remarks, he realized now. But the past could never be undone. It was too late to do anything about that.
Maybe it was even too late to do anything about his soul. Or was it? The dream came back forcibly to him now. The precipice. Yes, that's what that was" A precipice! He was heading for it. Blindly so. He hadn't seen it; so blinded was he by sin's allurements and its deadly pleasures. It was the voices that alerted him and brought him face to face with where he was heading. Voices? Voices!

Color drained from his cheeks. His legs felt as if they'd buckle beneath him. His knees felt weak. Voices! They were calling out to him. And to God, too. Begging. Pleading. Agonizing. Interceding. Voices! They got his attention. He saw the precipice. He was starting to go over it. Then the voices! Praying. Crying. And before he had plunged, headlong, over the abyss, the voices had cried out for mercy for him. He had awakened. And here he was, still alive. Alone. Or was he alone?

He broke out in a sweat. Was this God's message to him? Perhaps, even, His final message?

Marc dropped to the floor on his knees. He hadn't gone over the precipice. Almost! But not over. Those voices! He recognized them now. They belonged to his father and his mother. Why, they . . . they were praying for him! He knew the full meaning of the dream now: Unless he prayed clear through to victory and got back to God, he'd go over the abyss. Into heirs blazing inferno! To never, never again have another opportunity to repent and make his peace with God. His parents' prayers were the only thing that were keeping him from going over the precipice into eternal damnation.

He cried out to God to have mercy upon his soul, repenting of, confessing and forsaking his myriad sins and all that pertained to the old life. The storm raged, Marc wrestled, and victory came. The joy of the Lord flooded his soul. He became new in Christ. Oh, it was glorious. He had soul-rest and soul peace.

Still kneeling, he looked around the cabin which now seemed filled with God's presence. Flame light flickered and danced across the knotty pine walls and ceiling. The aroma of burning apple and beech wood saturated the room with memories of ripe October days. But he had springtime in his heart: The time of re-birth. And, for him, the time of a new beginning. Now he knew why his dad had wanted him to come to the cabin early. Yes, he knew. He had a wise father. And so Christ-like, too.
Outside, the wind whipped the snow around the cabin in great swirls of white. Frozen rhododendron leaves tapped icy fingers against the window panes. Above the whining of the wind was the roar of the ice-laced stream as it poured over the dam and rushed pass the cabin's back steps on its way to distant parts.

Marc wept for joy. No longer was his soul a stormy turmoil. He had inner peace. A perfect beginning for the New Year.