

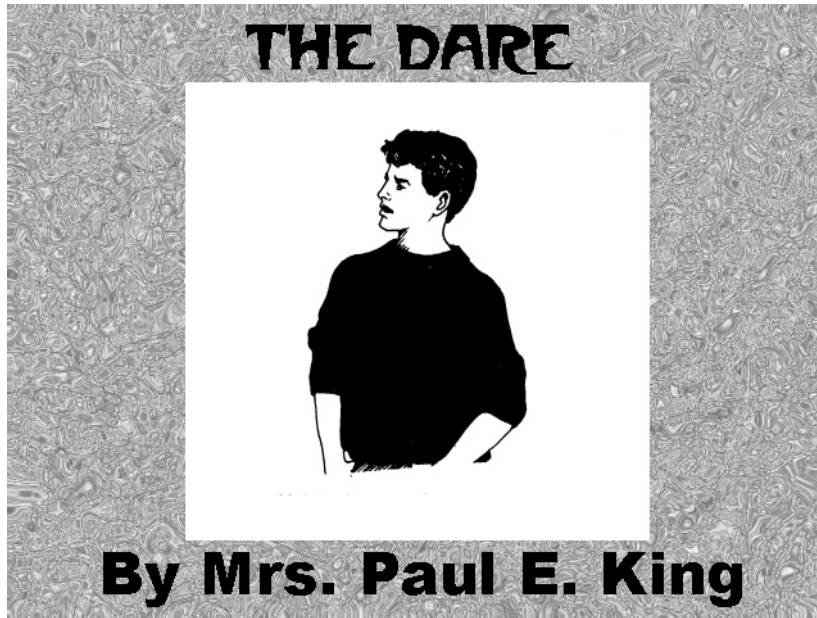
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**THE DARE**  
**(Part 1 of a 2 part story) By Mrs. Paul E. King**

Dave felt his pulse race as he rounded the corner of the cottage where he was staying for the week with his father and five other fellows from the church. Not again! he thought, as he heard Christopher Mapes challenge Ed Farley to a swim across the lake.

"I'll be waiting for you on the other side," Christopher

boasted, "while you're only halfway across. C'mon, Ed." Ed hesitated.

"You're afraid to take the risk; scared to accept the challenge," Chris taunted. "I know you. You're a coward."

Dave moved into the circle of fellows. "Don't be a fool, neither one of you," he said. "That water's cold. Cold! And it's three miles across. Cramps come easy out there."

"I'm not a baby!" Christopher exclaimed, indignant that Dave would dare to try to dissuade and stop him. "I'm an expert at swimming. I'm not a novice; no mere beginner. I'll beat you across, Ed. I know I will."

"Who says you will?" Ed asked, coming suddenly very much alive. "I'm neither a baby nor a sissy, Chris, and I'll show you a thing or two," he declared hotly as he raced from the cabin, through the woods to the water.

"Stop!" Dave cried. "Stop! Dad brought us here to fish, not to challenge each other to risk our lives in something so dangerous and foolish. You'll never make it across, neither one of you. I know what I'm saying. Come back, fellows."

"Are you kidding!" Christopher exclaimed. "Your dad's not here to boss us and I'm ready for some real excitement. You church fellows don't know what real fun is," he shouted across his shoulder as he out-distanced Ed and was soon in the lead toward the water's edge.

Dave sucked his breath in quick-like and gasped in fear as the pair disappeared from sight. Soon they would be at the lake, he knew. "They'll drown," he said, dropping onto the step at the cottage door. "Oh, if only Dad would not have had to go to the office today!" he cried, sensing goose bumps of fear tingling the entire length of his spine and sending cold chills through his body.

"You may as well try to stop a flood as to stop Chris when he gets something in his head," Frank Able declared. "He's disgustingly sickening with his braggadocio. He can always do everything better than anyone else, so he thinks."

"And faster and quicker," Tom Downs put in. "How'd he happen to be here?" he asked.

"I told Dad I'd like to bring him and Ed. I wanted them to see that being a Christian isn't dull nor boring, as he told me he knew it was. In other words, I had hoped they'd get saved while they're here with Dad and us. I've invited Ed and Chris time and again to come to church with me and they always turn me down."

"You had hoped this would be a springboard to get them interested, right, Dave?" Jim Quigley asked.

"Right. I wanted them to see that Christians are different but that we're not without having good times together. Good, clean, wholesome fun times. And I especially wanted them around you fellows because I know your testimonies ring true and you're genuine: you live what you profess. I wanted them to get a taste of the truly born again and sanctified wholly way of life and of living. And here they go, playing with death." Dave buried his face in his hands. "If Dad were only here," he said, "they'd never have done this."

"We have a Father in Heaven," Jim said softly. "We can pray."

Dave got to his feet. "Of course, Jim," he said, feeling the load lifting already. "Let's pray," he added, and in an instant's time all four of them were on their knees, praying for God to spare the two in the water and to save them at any cost.

They prayed until they made contact with Heaven, then Frank said, "You know, fellows, I have the blessed assurance in my soul that God is going to bring good out of this."

"I know He heard us," Tom declared with positive certainty.

"That's a fact," Dave added, putting his hands to his eyes and scanning the woods for Ed and Christopher, hoping they'd heeded his command not to race each other across in the icy-cold water.

"I can't see them," Jim stated, as his eyes searched the woods.

"Neither can I," Frank and Tom declared simultaneously.

"Do you suppose we ought to go looking for them?" Jim asked with concern.

"Absolutely," Dave replied. "We'll take both of the boats. And let's take all the life jackets too. We'll put ours on, and take Ed's and Christopher's in the boat. I have a feeling we'll be thankful we are wearing ours."

"You remember the fuss Chris made when your father insisted he put the life jacket on," Frank said, more as a statement than a question. "Whew! He was angry. I saw fire in his eyes. I'm sure it brought his ego down a few notches farther than it's ever been down to. And when he told your dad how well he could swim, and that he was not a 'mere beginner,' and your dad insisted, kindly, that he must put the jacket on, well, I wanted to shout hooray to your father for displaying some 'headship' to a very proud and self-willed young fellow. Frankly, I wonder if Chris has ever had to do anything he didn't want to do."

"That's something to think about, Frank," Dave commented as he hurried away after his life jacket. "He's one determined, proud and self-willed fellow, that's a for sure thing. And it just could be possible that he's had his own way all his life. In fact, I'm afraid he has."

"But God knows how to change the order of things," Tom added, making sure that his life jacket was secure. "And He knows how to bring circumstances about to affect that change. When He gets through with an individual the ego is in ashes and the starch and the pomp and show are gone. Eradicated. Rooted out."

"Christopher surely needs it," Jim said kindly as they hurried through the woods to the dock and unfastened the boats.

"There's not a sign of anybody out there," Frank remarked as he scanned the surface of the lake.

"I know," Dave answered, as he pushed away from the shore with one of the boats. "I'm fearful for them. Let's go, Jim. Every minute is important," he said, as Jim and Frank took the other boat.

"We're on our way," Jim replied. "Frank will do the searching while I row. I'll be watching, too, of course; but one can't do as thorough a job while pulling on oars."

"I'll do the looking for our boat, Dave," Tom said. "And if you get tired and want to switch jobs, I'm available and willing."

"Thanks Tom, I'll make it fine."

The gentle but consistently rapid dip and splash of the oars was the only sound that was made or heard for a long time.

"Any sign of the two?" Dave asked after a while. He felt responsible for Chris and Ed, since he had asked them to come along on the trip.

"Not a thing, Dave. Not a thing. The lake looks as smooth as glass. Where can those two be?" Tom asked, furrowing his brow and shielding his eyes from the glare of the sun with his hands.

Dave fell silent. They must find Chris and Ed. They must! Faster and faster he polled on the oars and farther and farther the boat darted away from the shore. Oh, if only he knew where to go. The lake was long; three miles across but many miles long. Ed and Chris could be anywhere out there. Unless they were found, Dave knew they'd drown.

He prayed silently but earnestly, sensing his utter inability and helplessness and his total dependence upon God, who knew the lake and knew where the two were.

Jim and Frank, who had taken a westerly course, saw what Frank took to be a large fish breaking through the surface of the water some distance to their left. But upon closer observation, and with eyes bent diligently upon finding Ed and Christopher, Frank became suddenly aware that what he had seen was not a fish; rather, it now appeared to be two arms flailing above the water's surface.

"Over there, Jim!" he shouted, pointing. "Give the oars all you've got. Someone's in trouble. Serious trouble."

"Where?" Jim asked, following Frank's directional index finger with his own keen eyes.

"I . . . I believe it's Ed," Frank gasped. "Pull harder on the oars if you can."

"Will do, Frank. I see him; whoever it is. And say, he's in big trouble by the looks of things. Any sign of the other one?"

Frank scanned the lake. "None. But, of course, he could have taken another course." He hoped his voice sounded more positive and sure than he felt. "Whichever one this is, he's pretty well spent. Look at him."

"What I'm able to see doesn't look good," Jim said. "We should soon be over there. Hey," he shouted, "hang in there, we're coming."

"He heard you," Frank declared jubilantly. "I'm sure he did. Yes, I know he did. He's heading this way, Jim. And it's Ed. He's beat."

"We're coming," Jim shouted again. Then, quickly, he said to Frank, "Remember everything you ever learned in the rules of swimming -- and of a drowning man. We'll have to follow the rules, Frank. . . ." His sentence trailed on a somberly-serious note. Frank prayed silently. Then he quoted, "The Lord is my helper; I shall not fear. . . ."

Ed started going down: Both Frank and Jim saw it.

"Hey, Ed," Frank shouted, "hang in there."

The boat was now almost alongside Ed. His strength was spent; he was exhausted: It was obvious.

"Ed," Jim's voice was calm and soft. "You know the rules of swimming, and the rules regarding a swimmer in distress. Need I say more?"

Ed's muffled and very weak voice said, "I understand what you're trying to say. I'll . . . cooperate, only . . . help . . . me . . . please. . . ."

"Do as I say," Jim said, giving softly-spoken orders and commands while Frank maneuvered the life preserver around Ed's chest. After

sometime, they got him into the boat, where he collapsed from sheer exhaustion.

"I wish we'd have brought a couple blankets," Frank told Jim. "He should be kept warm and we have nothing here to cover him with."

"We're going back to the cabin with him," Jim said, turning the boat around and heaping shoreward. "What about Chris?" Frank asked.

"As soon as Ed's warm and into dry clothes and seems all right, we'll be back, God willing. I only wish Dave's dad were here."

"So do I. But maybe he'll be back at the cabin before evening. I heard him tell Dave it may be half the day, or a bit more or less. And frankly, Jim, I hope it's less. If Ed needs medical assistance we have no way of getting him to a doctor. Hideaway cabins are wonderfully exciting except in cases of emergencies; then they become anything but exciting."

"That's a fact, Frank. But we must never forget that even in a hide-away out-of-the-way cabin, God sees us and is caring for us."

"And that's the most comforting thing of all," Frank answered. "What a mess Chris got Ed into. And over something so disgustingly foolish as a dare. It's absolutely senseless,"

"To us, yes, Frank: We're saved and sanctified wholly; our carnal pride and macho nature is dead -- crucified with Christ. But Chris' old nature is very much alive. Always, he must prove that he's the greatest; that he can out-do or out-perform anybody. It certainly is senseless. But that's carnality; always making trouble and getting people into messes. Well, we're almost at the dock. And say, Frank, I do believe Dave's dad is back already. I'm sure I see a car shining between the tree branches. See?" he said, nodding in the direction of the cabin that nestled cozily in the trees some distance away from the lake.

Frank shaded his eyes with his hands. "There's a car at the cabin, that's for sure. I hope it is Mister Hadden."

Jim pulled hard on the oars; Frank kept a close watch on Ed. They were making good time. Just as Jim drew alongside the dock Dave's father emerged from the tree-shaded woods.

"Hello," he called out cheerily. "Where's my son? And say, what's wrong with Ed? Where is Dave?" he asked quickly now as concern filled his voice. In a few rapid strides he was at the boat.

"Help us get Ed to the cabin, please," Jim said, tying the boat to the dock.

"He could have drowned," Frank said, adding that Chris had challenged him -- dared him -- to a swim across the lake.

Mr. Hadden gasped, "Where is Chris? And where is Dave? And Tom?"

Dave and Tom are somewhere out there hunting for Chris," Jim explained as Mr. Hadden lifted Ed's limp body out of the boat and walked swiftly toward the cabin.

"Frank, you run ahead and get some of that chicken soup heated," Mr. Hadden ordered kindly. "And have some blankets ready too."

"Yes, Sir," Frank, answered, as he raced ahead into the woods toward the cabin.

(Part 2)

Mr. Hadden wasted no time in getting Ed to the cabin. Like the gentle, kind-hearted man that he was, he put him gently down on one of the beds and wrapped him snugly and warmly in a soft blanket. Then, with the warm chicken soup heated by Frank, he "coaxed" trickles of the healthful broth through Ed's lips and into his mouth, praying as he did so. Suddenly, Ed's eyelids fluttered. Then they opened in glad surprise.

"I . . . I'm alive! Alive!" he exclaimed weakly, looking around the room from one face to another. "Thank God, I'm alive. And . . . and I'm happy. So very happy. I thought . . . I was drowning . . . out . . . there. I was . . . scared. I called out to God . . . for . . . mercy. He heard me: He forgave me of all my sins. I'm saved. Saved! And . . . and I'm still here alive! Oh, thank You, Lord

Jesus." He closed his eyes. Tears trickled out from beneath the eyelashes. "Where . . . where's . . . Chris?" he asked without opening his eyes.

"We don't know yet," Jim answered. "But don't you worry, Ed; God's going to help Dave and Tom to find him."

"You are to rest," Mr. Hadden said kindly. "Pray, if you can; but don't worry, Ed. We want you to get well and be strong again. Our heart rejoices in your salvation. This is worth everything. Now finish this broth then try to sleep. Someone will stay here with you while two of us go out to join Dave and Tom on the lake in search of Chris."

Ed opened his eyes, smiled weakly, thanked Mr. Hadden, then obediently sipped the broth until the bowl was empty and then he fell into a peaceful sleep.

"Frank, I'll take you with me out on the lake," Mr. Hadden remarked as soon as Ed was sleeping soundly. "And Jim, you keep a close watch on Ed. He'll be fine, I feel. But he has had quite a shock, from what you fellows told me. And if you need me, blow the car horn. I know now why I felt the urgency to get back here as quickly as possible. Pray for us," he added, as he stepped through the cabin doorway into the brilliant sunshine outside. "And especially, pray for Chris."

"You can be sure that I will," Jim said, standing in the doorway and watching as they hurried through the sun-dappled woods.

"Now to find that poor wayward Chris," Mr. Hadden said as Frank and he pulled away from the boat dock. "If only I could see Dave and Tom," he added, sending the boat swiftly away from the dock and out across the blue water with his skill at oars and the brawn of his strong arms.

"I'm wondering if they're not somewhere over near that finger that juts out into the lake, Mr. Hadden," Frank said. "They were headed in that direction when Jim and I last saw them. And they had their life preservers on, in case you were wondering."

Mr. Hadden gave Frank a grateful smile. "Good," he remarked, sending the boat quickly out into the deep toward the wooded finger that jutted far out into the lake.

"I see a boat," Frank stated, after a long time of swift but smooth rowing by Mr. Hadden.

"I see it too, Frank. And I'm sure it's Dave and Tom. A father's instinct can identify his son even when and if visibility is not yet discernible," Mr. Hadden said with a smile.

"There are only two in the boat, Sir. At least that's all that I can see from here." Frank's statement spoke its silent message: Chris was still not found.

Mr. Hadden's rowing speed increased. "We must find Chris, Frank. We must!" he exclaimed quickly.

"He's not ready for Heaven. . . ." His sentence trailed meaningfully and sadly.

"I know," Frank replied in understanding. "He's such a stubborn and rebellious young man, Mr. Hadden, and so full of braggadocio and pride until he becomes obnoxious. I know the Lord can change him; but, then, a fellow must want to be changed too."

"And God knows how to make one willing to be changed, Frank. I never cease to be amazed when I read how God sent the hornets before the children of Israel on their journey into the Canaan land, and the hornets drove the inhabitants out of the land so the Israelites could take possession of the land."

"Dave and Tom see, us," Frank cried. "They're waving to us."

"They turned, Frank. They're coming to meet us!" Mr. Hadden exclaimed, pulling harder on the oars. "I hope they have good news for us."

In a little while the boats were side by-side. "Dad!" Dave's glad exclamation of surprise brought tears to Mr. Hadden's eyes. "How . . . where. . .? Oh-h Dad, am I ever glad you're here! I . . . I'm sorry about Chris and Ed. I tried to stop them, but . . . I . . . I failed. Oh Dad, it's awful: they don't know the Lord!"

"Ed does, Son," Mr. Hadden stated sweetly and reassuringly. "He nearly lost his life over this folly. But this noble and brave boy -- Frank -- and Jim found him and rescued him. But Ed was rescued spiritually before Jim and Frank found him! This is the best news of all."

"Really?" Both Dave and Tom asked.

"Where is Ed?" Dave asked quickly.

"At the cabin recovering. Sleeping. Jim's with him."

"Oh, Dad, thank God! Dave cried as tears rolled down his cheeks.

"There's not a single sign of Chris," Tom stated on a very sad note. "We've looked and prayed and called and prayed then looked some more. Oh, Mister Hadden, I'm . . . I'm afraid for Chris. Afraid he's . . . he's . . . lost. He's so vain and full of pride. His pride made him dare Ed to the swim across the lake."

"I told them they'd never make it, Dad, not in this icy-cold water. And, besides, it's three miles across. I told them that, too," Dave told his father. "But Chris wouldn't listen. He kept saying he was an excellent swimmer. He told Ed he was a coward, that he was afraid to accept his challenge. That's when Ed's anger surfaced and, how, with indignation, he raced ahead of Chris toward the lake, declaring that he was neither a sissy nor a baby. Oh Dad, why did I ask them to come along? Chris has caused nothing but trouble for us since he got here. He resents your giving of orders and your insistence upon those orders being carried out and obeyed."

"I know, Dave, I know. But Chris hasn't been reared in a Christian home such as you fellows have. He's pretty much had his own way, and this spells trouble for any child. God's order of things for the family is for children to honor and to obey their parents: Chris knows absolutely nothing about this. He is to be pitied. I feel Chris has been a most unhappy young man. From his boyhood days, I mean," Mr. Hadden declared.

"He's had anything and everything he's ever wanted, Dad," Dave stated sadly. "He told me so. I guess his folks are pretty well off financially."

"Things -- or money -- can't buy happiness; nor inner peace and true satisfaction," Mr. Hadden said.

"I know," Dave answered. "That's why I've been so anxious for Chris and Ed to get converted: only Jesus can satisfy the soul and its deep longing. But now I'm afraid it's too late for Chris. Oh, Dad," Dave cried. "I'll never be able to forgive myself for inviting Chris here if he drowns and . . . and dies in his sins."

"Remember the thief on the cross, Dave," Mr. Hadden said. "It just may take a brush with death to shake Chris awake to his need of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let's continue the search; and if we don't soon find him I'll take the car and run to the little store and call for help. Heave ho, Dave. Don't get too far away that we'll lose sight of each other. My guess is that Chris isn't -- or wasn't -- out nearly so far as to the finger over there. Let's head back toward the shore, staying out as far as each of you think you could have swum in the same amount of time as they've been gone. OK, let's go."

"Thanks, Dad; will do," Dave said, pushing away across the water.

"Oh, one last thing," Mr. Hadden called as the boats separated, "I told Jim to blow the car horn if he needed us. So if anybody hears the horn, we'll let each other know. Got it?"

"Right on," both Dave and Tom answered simultaneously, rowing in a straight course to a point closer to the shore than where they had been.

Ten minutes passed. Fifteen. Twenty. Not a single sign of Chris. Nothing. Nothing but fish breaking the surface of the water for a tasty morsel of insect. And then, with the suddenness of an unexpected downpour of rain from the sky, the sound of the car horn blared across the water -- in staccato fashion at first then followed by legato, with no breaks between.

Mr. Hadden turned his eyes toward Dave's and Tom's boat. They too had heard the horn's insistent blowing. They waved their hands and motioned toward the shore and the cabin. As if on cue, both boats gushed shoreward, pulling up at the dock about the same time.

Worried that something had happened to Ed, Mr. Hadden and Frank raced ahead with Dave and Tom right behind. There was no time for words:

Every minute counted. If they couldn't find Chris, at least they must do all within their power to save Ed's life.

Mr. Hadden rushed into the cabin, breathing heavily from the run. "What's wrong, Jim?" he asked. "Is . . . Ed . . . worse?"

"Ed's fine," Jim answered. "Go see for yourself. And so is Chris."

"Chris? What do you mean?"

Jim was nearly beside himself with joy. Words tumbled from his lips. "Chris got saved!" he exclaimed. "He came stumbling and dragging himself, actually and literally, into the cabin some time ago. He was beat; done in. I knew I had to work fast to save him. You see, he collapsed inside the door. I worked over him, rubbing him, drying him off, and praying all the while. I called his name over and over but got no response. I wrapped a warm blanket around him, heated broth from the chicken soup and followed your procedure to the letter, Brother Hadden. At last he opened his eyes. When he recognized me, he whispered, "I'm all right, Jim. I met the Lord Jesus Christ out on the water. Tell Dave if I die I'll be in Heaven. Forgiven. I'm forgiven. I thought of what Dave said, about not making it across and of the icy cold water. I turned around and headed shoreward, feeling my legs beginning to cramp. Thought I wasn't going to make it. Yes sir, I did. But after the Lord forgave me, He helped me to the shore, I'm weak, Jim. So weak. . . ."

"He fell asleep on the floor, in the blanket. I got him up on the bed and he and Ed have both been sleeping like babies. As soon as I saw he'd be all right, I ran out and started blowing the horn."

Mr. Hadden slapped Jim on the shoulder in a fatherly fashion, stating, "I'm proud of you, Jim; proud of all of you wonderful young men. You've proved yourselves noble soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ for many years. These two, asleep in the room, will have wonderful role models to follow -- true holiness role models. Now, let us bow our heads in prayer and thank the Lord for not only saving these two from a cold, watery grave but from a burning hell as well."

Reverently, and with freely flowing tears, all heads bowed and prayers of praise roared heavenward.

The End