

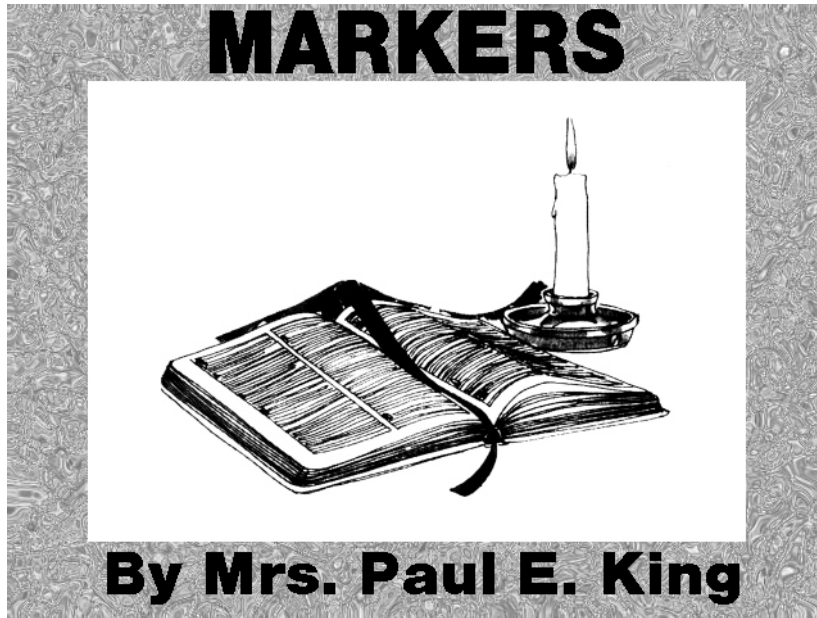
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MARKERS
By Mrs. Paul E. King

"Oh, Dad, please, let's take it," Mark begged of his father as they stood in awe of the giant rock formation in the park and the almost unnoticeable trail before them.

"What if you get lost!" Mrs. Bell exclaimed, knowing full well the possibility of such.

"Dad's great at directions," came Mark's instant reply. "And we have the compass. This trail looks too interesting and exciting to pass up."

Mr. Bell, standing with his binoculars focused in on the highest mountain peak, smiled, and said, "Have a look, Mark. The tallest peak, my boy." He passed the binoculars to the son who was no longer a mere child but was, instead, a tall, broad-shouldered, fine-looking young man, so much like himself that they often passed for brothers.

"Sheep. Mountain sheep! Did you ever see anything more beautiful! Here, Mother, you and Missy must have a look at those magnificent creatures up there. I counted twenty-eight of them. Just wait until you see those curly horns. Magnificent, that's what they are. I'm sure glad you brought us out here, Dad," Mark said as he passed the binoculars on to his mother.

"It will perhaps be the last vacation we'll take together as a family," Mr. Bell stated. "You'll be leaving for college within a few short weeks, God willing, and, generally, when one goes away to college the years of family togetherness come to an end. Oh, you'll come home, the Lord willing, but it will be only to stay a short while: other things and other interests will keep you busy and preoccupied. I wanted this vacation to be one of our best, Mark; sort of a keepsake for your future rememberings."

Giving his father a warm and meaningful hug, Mark said, "They've all been the best, Dad. I have one corner of my closet shelf full of best memories and I treasure every single one of those pictures of our past vacations. Surely, you don't think I'll be leaving for good, though! I mean, I'll perhaps be working somewhere near home after I graduate. If God's will is thus, this is what I plan to do."

Mr. Bell smiled. "Time will tell, Mark," he replied. "Time has a way of changing things and people. There will be young women there . . ." he added meaningfully with a broad smile.

"I'm going for an education, Dad," the young man answered seriously, hoping his father would get the message that he was not going there with any intention of getting a wife.

"I know. I know, son. I had the same good intention and resolve when I went to Bible college. That is, until your wonderful mother came on campus and into my heart and my life. Everything changed after that, and I've never for one moment regretted or been sorry for the change. God led us together as surely as the sun is shining above us."

Mark was thankful for God's leadership in his parents' lives but it didn't change his resolve about going to Bible school for education only.

"Yes, Mark, time will tell," his father repeated with a hint of mischief showing on his face. "Many things change when one grows up and leaves home. But now, about this trail. It's labeled 'primitive.' According to the literature I picked up back at the park headquarters, a primitive trail is one that is marked only with small piles of rocks."

"They're called cairns," Mark commented. "I read the same paper, Dad. I thought it would be interesting to see where these unusual markers would take us."

"With rocks everywhere, do you think you'll be able to discern what is a marker though?" Mrs. Bell questioned.

"I guess that's why I feel it will be so interesting and challenging and exciting," Mark answered. "I have a feeling it's going to take diligence and concentration, though, to discern the trail markers from the myriad other rocks here in the park."

Smiling, Mr. Bell said, "Let's go. It will be challenging, I'm sure, and I'm beginning to catch some of your excitement, son. What's more, the exercise will be great."

"I think it may be best if Missy and I stay here," Mrs. Bell announced as she looked at the ten-year-old daughter by her side. "All those rocks and this uneven terrain may be a bit too much for Missy and me, especially so since we don't have any proper shoes for hiking. You two go; Missy and I'll drive back to park headquarters then come back for you, here, whenever you tell us to come. OK?"

"I think that's the best thing to do," Mr. Bell agreed. "Missy's shoes weren't made for hiking. Neither are yours, my dear. Mark and I'll be the

explorers this time. Come back for us within two or two and a half hours, God willing. And say, maybe we'd better take that water-filled canteen along: I'm sure we'll need it out here."

"Take mine too," Missy insisted, remembering how she had saved and saved to buy one for herself when she heard her father say that their vacation for the summer would be in a dry, arid, desert place, mostly. She hadn't waited until they arrived in the dry, arid desert to use it, however. No way! That clear treasure of a "fountain" had served her well in the car all the way on the trip. The water had tasted so good: the canteen had kept it fresh and cold. She refilled it each and every time they had stopped to eat, carrying it either over her shoulder or around her neck. Having her very own canteen made her feel quite grown up.

Smiling broadly, Mr. Bell declared, "Two canteens are better than one and, of course, we'll take yours, Missy. That is very kind and generous of you. Now don't forget, be back here within the stated time. I think Mark and I will be thankful for the car by then."

"Be careful, both of you, and keep your eyes open for those small piles of rocks," Mrs. Bell admonished. "God willing, Missy and I'll be back for you in plenty of time."

Watching until the two hikers were lost to their view behind one of many mammoth rock formations, Mrs. Bell and Missy drove back to park headquarters and the rustic cabin which they had rented.

"This is good time to get our hair washed, Missy."

"And to read that new book I got from Grandma before starting out on the trip," Missy declared emphatically. "I can hardly wait to begin reading it. This is now that long waited-for opportunity, and Mark won't be able to make me feel guilty for reading and not watching the scenery, since there is nothing to watch in here. Oh goody, goody, two hours of uninterrupted reading while my hair is drying!" and Missy spun around and around in the room, adding, "Grandma always gets me the best books in all the world. Goody! Goody, now I can read."

"I'll wash your hair first, my little bookworm," Mrs. Bell said as she hugged Missy. "Since you are so anxious to read, this will get you free for

your favorite pastime in only a few minutes. Bring me the shampoo from the luggage, please. . . ."

The two hours seemed to fly by for Missy who was only halfway through the wonderful story when her mother told her they must leave to pick up Mark and Mr. Bell.

"Bring your book along," the mother advised. "We may have to wait for the men and this will help to occupy time for you. I'm taking my Bible and a religious periodical I brought along on this vacation. I enjoy reading at night, until I'm sleepy. I had hoped to read the paper then; but now is as good a time as any, especially if we have a long wait."

"Oh, thank you, Mother. This is so exciting and interesting. I can hardly bear to put a book down when it's like this one. Grandma seems to know just what I like."

"Maybe that's because Grandma was a little girl one day: a little girl like her dear granddaughter Missy."

Missy laughed. "It's hard for me to imagine Grandma ever being a little girl. I mean this, Mother. But I know she was, even though I've known her only as an adult. I know that the books she gets for me are my very favorite books of all. They make me want to be more like Jesus, and they help me to love Him more and more too."

Mrs. Bell parked the car in the place where her husband had parked it earlier in the day; then she and Missy settled down to their books, allowing the intense silence to convey them along on their journey of reading, Missy into the excitement of the story and Mrs. Bell into the Acts of the Apostles first, and later, into the lives of the missionaries about whom she was reading in the periodical. Each was so engrossed in her reading that she took notice of neither the time nor of the sun's receding rays.

Finishing her book, Missy closed it softly, then laid down on the back seat and was soon asleep. Mrs. Bell, lulled into the deliciously-delightful tranquillity and peaceful solitude of the surroundings plus a gently-cool breeze that sneaked in through the open car windows and played a game of tag with the loose tendrils of her freshly-washed hair, fell asleep too.

It was the penetrating chill of the night air that awakened her and made her sit up with a sudden start and a stab of fear. Her husband and son, where were they? They should have been back hours ago! Why had she permitted herself to have fallen asleep? Why? Oh, where were those she loved? Where? Lost! They were lost. Somewhere out in that vast, trackless, rocky desert, they were lost. She knew it.

Panic churned her stomach and boiled up inside her being. Then she remembered: yes, she remembered --" 'The Lord is my shepherd,'" she quoted to trembling, panicky heart. "'I shall fear no evil. . . .'"

"Missy!" she called, turning to her sleeping daughter on the back seat. "We must get back to the ranger headquarters immediately. Your father and brother are lost." With that, the car's engine came to life and she sped away into the night.

Never had lights been more welcome than those at Ranger Headquarters as she pulled up to the front and hurried inside with a wide-awake, wide-eyed Missy clinging tightly to her hand.

It was only a matter of minutes until she had told her story and a group of park rangers had organized a search party and had a lighted helicopter in the air, following Mrs. Bell as she drove back to where she had last seen her husband and son.

The night seemed interminable as mother and daughter waited and prayed in the car. Sleep was totally and completely out of the question. The helicopter's noise would have been a welcome sound but it had long since faded and died away as it disappeared in the sky behind the myriad grotesque rock formations.

Shortly before dawn the two were found, tired and hungry but otherwise fine and in good shape. "We failed to keep our eyes on the markers," Mr. Bell stated as they drove back to the cabin.

"We became fascinated with the unusual and mammoth rock formations," Mark added, "and in our hiking over to where they stood, towering over us and shading us from the sun's hot rays, we forgot about those stone-piled markers which we had left. We even climbed up on some of the rocks, where we could. Talk about a view!"

"We forgot about time and markers," Mr. Bell admitted. "We were completely engrossed with the rocks."

"And taking pictures," Mark said. "By the time we walked away from where we were and started out to find the barely-marked trail, we'd see something else that looked too interesting to miss, so we'd hike over to it. We saw many beautiful places and things but we lost the markers completely. Never did find them again."

"I told Mark that I had one of the greatest, never-to-be-forgotten lessons of my life by getting lost," Mr. Bell declared as he pulled the car up in front of the rented cabin. "I learned how very important it is to heed and obey God's 'markers'; to ever and always keep our eyes and heart upon them."

"God's markers aren't piles of stones," Missy added. "So what does He have, Daddy?"

"The Bible, honey. His Word -- the Holy Word -- is a lamp to our feet and a light for our pathway. His 'markers' are plainly and readily visible and discernible for all who will to see and follow and to never, ever get lost along the road. Isaiah declared that God's highway, called, 'The way of holiness,' 'shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though a fool, shall not err therein.' That means that even the simplest individual can easily see his way along this 'way of holiness.' It's a well-marked highway, this 'way of holiness': no cairns here. Ah no! The Word is our lamp and our light and the Holy Spirit is our constant Companion and Guide. He leads us gently along this wonderful highway, directing and guiding us lest we lose our way in the maze of life's fascinating 'rock formations.'"

"Amen!" Mark exclaimed as he got out of the car. "And again I say, Amen." Joyfully and thankfully, they went into the cabin.