

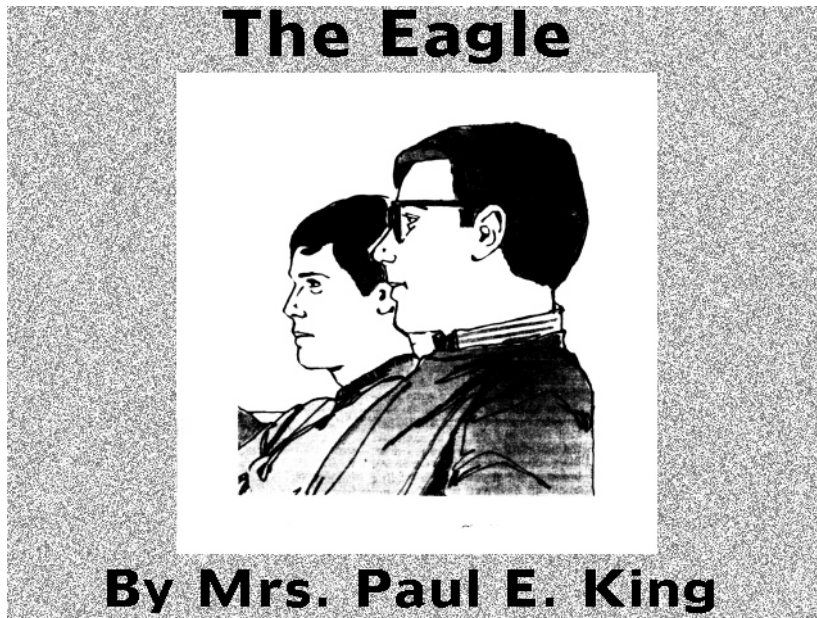
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**THE EAGLE**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

"I can hardly believe this is real, Chad!" Gregg said, coming up alongside his cousin, easing the pack off his back and dropping it to the soft pine needle carpet on the ground.

"Well, it is real, Gregg, and Dad and Mom and Karma and I sure are glad you could be with us."

"I'm honored -- that your folks and you asked me to go with you on your vacation. I can hardly believe it's real, though," Gregg said again, unfastening his pack and extracting the sleeping bag from it. "Whew! This mountain climbing sure makes one hungry. I feel starved!"

"Me too. But Mom and Karma will soon have something prepared. How about doing some fishing while we wait for supper? Dad's already down at the stream."

"Sounds great to me, Chad. Let's go." And Gregg grabbed his fishing paraphernalia and was off.

Chad checked his wallet to make sure his fishing licenses were all intact. Then he hurried to the gushing, cold, clear mountain stream. "Any luck, Dad?" he asked, casting his line into the water.

For answer, Mr. Murdock held up a stringer with three beautiful mountain trout on it.

"The Ranger at park headquarters was right, fellows," he said, "the stream's loaded with fish."

Chad, used to camping and cooking out yearly with his folks and his sister, could scarcely wait to sink his teeth into the pan-fried, freshly-caught trout. Gregg was in for a treat, he soliloquized silently as a satisfied smile parted his lips.

"Here's number one for me," Gregg exclaimed joyfully, reeling in his first catch. "What a beauty!" he said, awestricken.

"Say, that is a dandy," Howard Murdock remarked, adding it to his catch. "It's the biggest one caught yet, Gregg. You're doing great. Keep it up."

Exited and thrilled over his success, Gregg forgot all about the hunger pains as he threw the line out time and time again and was duly rewarded.

"I guess that does it for today, boys," Mr. Murdock announced when each had caught his limit. "Now it's scaling and cleaning time; then back to camp -- where the skillet's ready and waiting."

"And suddenly I'm hungry again" Gregg announced, "very, very hungry!"

Chad laughed. "You forgot how starved you were when you were fishing, didn't you, Gregg?"

"I sure did. Funny, too, now that we're through, my hunger pains are absorbing my every thought."

"Your aunt accuses me of preferring fishing to eating, Gregg," Mr. Murdock declared pleasantly. "And in reality she's right; I'd far rather fish than eat, as well as I enjoy the finished skillet product. But there's just something about fishing.

"For one thing, Dad, God and man draw close to each other." Chad said. "At least I always feel this way about it when I'm fishing with you. Everything's peaceful and quiet and utterly tranquil. And in this setting, my heart meditates upon God and communes with Him. Everything else fades away -- studies, problems, trials, cares, and burdens and yes, even the desire for food."

"I haven't been privileged to go fishing many times," Gregg said, "but you're right, Chad. God does come close as one fishes and meditates upon Him and His goodness."

"Anytime spent alone with God," Mr. Murdock added, "away from the hustling, bustling multitude with its clamor and din and noise, is time well spent. That's the reason we prefer a vacation in the quiet and peace of the mountains. Each of us goes home refreshed -- bodily and spiritually."

"Suppers almost ready," Mrs. Murdock announced when the three entered camp.

"All but the fish," Howard Murdock replied. "These will be ultra-fresh and super-good. Chad, you and Gregg will have a chance to display your expertise as chefs. The frying's all yours."

"And the skillet's ready," Karma informed. "I'll have the plates waiting."

"This is great, Chad!" Gregg exclaimed. "I've never fried fish before."

"You'll do a lot of nice things up here that you've never done before" Chad told his cousin.

"For one thing, we eat fish at least once every day -- sometimes even for breakfast. And wait till you taste Mother's breakfast fish! Delicious is the word!"

"What's different about them, Chad?"

"Mom salts some down for a day or two. And before we eat them, she drains the brine off and rinses them several times in cold water. Then she flours them and fries them crispy-brown. Um-m! Wonderful!" Chad declared emphatically. "I love them!"

"Sounds delicious," Gregg answered, feeling more starved and empty by the minute.

"And you need not sound so . . . so exclusive, Chad," Karma chided playfully. "Just say 'we' instead of 'I' for all of us think Mothers salted-down fish is super-super."

"You're right, Sis; no denying that fact. It's a taste treat Gregg has yet to experience."

After supper, Gregg and Chad left camp for a hike to a nearby point.

"Quite frequently, I've seen eagles from here," Chad explained to his cousin as they settled themselves on a large flat rock.

"I hope we're fortunate tonight and see one," Gregg voiced, glancing skyward. "What species are they? Do you know?"

"They're generally the golden eagle, Gregg. Dad and I love to watch them. They're magnificent, and so very strong. There's just something about an eagle!" he added emphatically, with a look of awe on his face and wonder in his eyes.

"They are a kingly looking bird, Chad and . . . say, look! Look! There's one right now. See?" and Gregg pointed skyward toward the east.

"It's an eagle all right!" Chad exclaimed in what was little more than an awe-inspired whisper. "A beautiful golden eagle," he added, equally fascinated, as his binoculars brought the eagle into sharp focus. "Looks like he has his supper in his sharp talons, too."

"He does have something, doesn't he? It looks like a weasel," Gregg said.

"More likely than not you're right. Well, he won't go to bed hungry. That's a bit consoling," Chad said, laughing softly.

"Look carefully," Gregg said quickly. "He's not able to rise any higher. Something's wrong. Wrong!"

"Yes, and he's just overhead, too. Oh, Gregg, Gregg! He's falling! Fall . . .!"

Before Chad could finish his last words there was a loud "plop" and the magnificent eagle lay at his feet, a lifeless mass of beauty.

What could be the matter? the boys wondered, staring in mute silence at the beautiful bird. No man's shot had reached it; no human hand had harmed it. What could have happened?

"Oh, Gregg," Chad moaned examining the eagle. "Oh, Gregg, no. No!"

"What's wrong, Chad?" Gregg asked, bending over to have a more thorough look. "You . . . you don't think . . . the weasel. . . ."

"I don't think; I know!" Chad exclaimed sadly. Tears stood in his eyes. "Such a little thing," he said half-aloud. "Such a very, very little thing. See?" and Chad pried the weasel loose. "The little creature wormed itself partly out of the strong, sharp talons and, in having to draw those talons close to its body in order to gain altitude, the weasel drank the lifeblood from the eagles breast."

The boys were speechless for a long while, standing over the golden eagle and staring with disbelieving eyes at the scene before them.

"It . . . it's just like sin is," Gregg finally stammered. "Several of the fellows at school all but begged me to try smoking pot. Imagine! I rather believe they were just testing me -- trying me -- to see what I'd say."

"What did you say?" Chad asked.

"I told them I found something better -- in Christ and through Christ -- than anything they'd ever heard of or tried. I told them to take my advice and turn to the Lord in true repentance and contrition of heart and they'd learn the full meaning of real joy and happiness. They merely laughed at me and said, 'We expected something like that.'"

"But you were right, Gregg. Those same fellows started out, no doubt, by doing things that appeared relatively harmless to them at first: just one glass of strong cider or wine; one draw on a friend's cigarette; one slang word. Suddenly they awoke to the startling fact that what had once appeared so insignificant and utterly harmless now had a death-like grip upon their appetites and their body. And try as they will to free themselves, they're bound by these sinful habits and desires."

"And, like the weasel Gregg added sadly, "sin is sapping the very lifeblood from these poor fellows and girls. How I wish I could help them!"

"Prayer is our strongest weapon in trying to help them, Gregg -- prayer and consistent Christ-like living -- along with warning them and testifying to them whenever possible."

Lifting the giant eagle from where it had fallen, Chad added sadly, "Let's take him back to camp, Gregg. Anything so magnificent and stately deserves a sensible burial. And Dad will want to see him, too."

With bowed heads and in total silent, the pair started down the mountainside toward camp.

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THE END