

Transfiguration
Freida Upson
Upbeat
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“Just in time! We’re closing this section in a few minutes. Visibility very low. Be careful.”

From the expressway ticket booth the agent in his smart gray-blue uniform handed Chuck the toll ticket for entering the New York State Thruway. The heat lamp in the booth glowed red through the snow laden air. The wind nearly whipped the piece of cardboard from Chuck’s hand. He rolled the window up quickly and turned to the girl in the car beside him.

“Well, that’s good luck anyhow! Now we’ll be home in half an hour. What a night!”

Anne sank back against the seat and said nothing. A sudden gust stirred the light powdery snow into a dense cloud that boiled and churned about them. For several moments they could not see the road. The heater in the car scarcely made any impact on the zero temperature and the wind. Anne closed her eyes while Chuck struggled to hold the car on its course. When the wind dropped and the air cleared, he could see that he driven off on the shoulder. He righted the car and said cheerfully,

“It’ll blow itself out my morning.”

“It’s morning now,” said Anne glancing at her watch. The time was two a.m. “I’m sorry now that I didn’t call home before we left. They’ll worry about me.”

“Bah, parents are always worrying about something or other,” said Chuck blandly. “They think young people can’t take care of themselves.”

Anne was silent again. The little car was bravely bucking the wind. Chuck kept his eyes focused on the road where the headlights showed swirls of snow eddying across the concrete. Anne could feel the car accelerate, and as she watched the rapidly changing movements of the snow swirls, she felt hypnotized by the motion. She closed her eyes again.

Suddenly there was a change of motion. The car turned sideways, then back, then the other way, and finally spun around in a complete circle. She opened her eyes to see Chuck grappling with the steering wheel, turning it first one way and then the others. There was a sudden tremendous jolt and the car stopped.

“Hell, that’s done it,” Chuck muttered savagely. “What a helluva time to hit a patch of ice.”

Anne felt her insides contract unpleasantly while her heart pounded.

The minutes passed. Anne continued to pray. She received every prayer, every psalm, every hymn that she could think of and then began again. Chuck said not a word, but he stopped scraping at the window. He stopped shuffling his feet and noisily beating his hands together. Both he and Anne were terribly cold. After a while Chuck took her hands in his and rubbed them gently to increase circulation. Anne did not object. She continued unfalteringly with her prayers, even though her lips were stiff with cold.

Finally, when she paused for a moment, Chuck said, “Anne, I want to tell you I’m sorry. Sorry about everything, I mean, bringing you here and saying what I did. I laughed about you praying, but I’ll tell you this: I don’t know whether we’ll get out of this mess I made, but even if we don’t. I’ve learned something I’m glad I learned. I’m not any warmer than I would have been, but I could stand it better with you here and knowing that you have a Friend who is with us also. You see, I never knew anybody who was really friendly with God before. When you talk to Him, He seems to be right there. And of course, when He’s right there, somehow you don’t act just the same as you would if you were all by yourself. It makes a difference, and I never realized it before. I think I know now why you go to Church. I used to think you must be out of it.”

He paused and looked Anne squarely in the eyes. “Do you suppose, if we do get out of this mess –“

“We will,” said Anne, “I know we will, Chuck.”

“If we do,” continued Chuck slowly. “I’d like to go to Church with you some time.”

There was a lull in the wind. They could hear the sound of an approaching vehicle. Chuck rolled down the window part way and peered out. In a few minutes a figure appeared by the car.

“How are you folks doing in there?” queried a voice. “Pretty cold out here. How about some hot coffee? I’ll take you to the next exit and we can pull your car out in the morning.”

It was a State Trooper. Anne and Chuck were so stiff with cold they could hardly walk, but he helped them through the snow and up the incline to a car with a revolving red light on top.

“You kids had your luck with you tonight,” he remarked as they stowed themselves in the back seat. “You could just as well have frozen stiff.”

“I know,” said Chuck. “It wasn’t all just luck though.”