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The Decision

By Mrs. Paul E. King

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Emilie tripped down the stairs lightly and quietly, hoping to avoid another encounter with her father and mother. She loved them, but she was weary of hearing them tell her they were praying for her. By law, she was now of age and she could do what she wanted to do.

"Don't be late, Emilie."

Her mother's voice, slicing into her bitter thoughts, reached her ears before she made the last step even.

"Please, Mother," she begged, sounding far more kind than she felt, "stop worrying about me. I'm not a baby anymore."



"If only you were where you once were!" her mother said tearfully. "Oh, Emilie, please, please come back to God! I beg you."

"Where are you going?" Mr. Brooke asked, coming into the living room just then. "Why not go to the revival meeting with your mother and me?"

Emilie turned white. Grabbing her coat and scarf, she hurried toward the door. "Must I always give account of my business?" she asked in anger as she opened the door and rushed outside.

The grief-stricken parents, shocked by the radical change in their daughter since her recent backsliding, stood staring at the door in dumb silence. Then, taking his

trembling wife gently by her arm, Mr. Brooke said softly, "We can pray, dear; never forget this. And now, let's go to church."

Once outside, Emilie shrugged into her warm coat. She hadn't realized how biting cold the wind was; she wished she would have brought a head scarf along. Whatever had prompted her to baby-sit? she wondered, suddenly wishing she had never promised Jeannie that she'd watch her children. But then, Jeannie was a good friend of hers. Maybe not the kind of friend her parents would have approved of, but that didn't matter anymore. She, Emilie Marie Brooke, was now considered (by law) to be of age. Certainly this should entitle her the freedom of picking and choosing her own friends, she reasoned stubbornly.

At thought of Jeannie, Emilie's heart had its own misgivings and questions--many for which she had no answers. Still, Jeannie had some good traits and characteristics, she told herself as she hastened toward the bus stop.

The wind whistled and moaned through the branches of the naked trees, chinning her to the bone and sending shivers of fear racing up and down her spine. It was quite eerie really. Suddenly Emilie wished she hadn't come. Especially, she should not have left the house with the sarcastic words which she had uttered lingering behind. Her parents meant well; they had only her best interests at heart, she knew.

She was almost at the bus stop when a noise like that of a gun being discharged stopped her dead still. In fear, she looked across her shoulder, and there behind her, not more than two feet away, was a giant limb. The wind in its fierceness and severity had snapped the limb like it was little more than a tinker toy and lain it almost at her heels.

Emilie broke into a run. Two feet away! She was just two feet away from either sudden and immediate death or a possible crippling for life. Why the two feet? It could have been two feet in front of her! And, had it been in front of her... !

The thought was horrifying. She knew where she would have been had God allowed the limb to strike her dead.

An icy wind cut her face as she waited for the bus. Seeing the unlighted house nearby, she rushed over and huddled in the doorway to catch her breath, keeping a watchful eye down the street for the lights of the bus. Above the whine of the wind, she heard a sound. Singing! And music! Surely not; no one but a fool would be out in weather of this kind!

"No one understands like Jesus... He's a Friend beyond compare; meet Him at the throne of Mercy... He is waiting for you there . . ."

Emilie gasped. Those voices! They sounded like the Henderson girls' trio from the church where she had gone before she backslid. What were they doing out on a night

like tonight? And the trumpets and trombones--how could anyone play in this frigid night air? Wouldn't the valve oil congeal and the compressed lips stick painfully to the mouthpiece?

"No one understands like Jesus . . ."

How beautifully Anetta, Judy and RoseAnn's voices blended, Emilie thought, brushing tears aside and hurrying from the darkened doorway to board the approaching bus.

All the way to Jeannie's house, the dumbstruck eighteen-year-old wondered what had compelled the group of young people to hold a street meeting on a night as wretchedly cold as this night. She was sure they must all be nearly frozen to death. Why tonight? The streets were deserted; it was not like holding a Saturday night service when there was activity on almost every street corner.

The questions racing through her brain demanded answers, and the only possible solution and answer she could find was that God had led them out on the street tonight.., for her.

She leaned her head against the cold glass of the window and closed her eyes, trying desperately but vainly to push the nagging thought into some dark corner of her brain, only to be jarred rudely and violently out of her attempts by the bus fish-tailing its way down the street at far too fast a pace.

Emilie screamed. She tried to get to her feet but the bus, careening first to the left then the right, threw her on the floor.

"Sit down!" the frightened bus driver shouted through set teeth. "Stay calm!" he ordered as the bus swung around on the ice and came to an abrupt halt in a high snow bank.

Emilie, covering her face with her hands, peeked through her slightly parted fingers. The driver's heartfelt, "Thank God" caused her to look through the window. What she saw made her shudder: the bus had turned completely around and fish-tailed between two giant maple trees into the snow bank. It was a miracle! Yes, a real miracle, and no one but God could have ordered it to have missed the trees

Getting to her feet, she started for the door. "Let me out, please," she said through falling tears.

"Anyone else want out?" the driver asked, perspiring in spite of the cold. "We'll be here for a while, from the look of things. But we're fortunate, I tell you Emilie stumbled off the bus and ran toward Jeannie Rousmann's house as fast as she could go. How many more warnings would God allow before judgment struck? she wondered.

Jeannie met her at the door, her face painted and her blouse entirely too low cut. "You had me worried, Emilie," she said, ushering the frightened girl inside. "I changed my mind; I'm not going out tonight I thought it would be fun if I taught you how to play cards and manipulate a Ouija board. Here, give me your coat and we'll get started. For once, the children are deeply engrossed with that modeling clay set you bought them. Guess they finally learned what it's for."

Emilie stood inside the doorway, scarcely believing what Jeannie had said.

"Here, I want your coat," the twenty-year-old mother said, giving a tug at Emilie's arm.

Like one awakening from a bad dream, Emilie said, "Thanks, Jeannie. But unless you need me, I'll go home."

"Chicken to try the board?" Jeannie's eyes flashed fire. "Look, Em, I know about you and your background; I used to see you at Pineville youth camp years ago. I was there. Oh, only once or twice-not over three times, if that many. But I grew tired of church and all this goody-goody stuff. I decided to live my life the way I wanted to live it, not the way my dear old father and mother wanted me to live it..."

Emilie gasped; Jeannie laughed. "You're shocked, aren't you? Especially the way I said that about my parents. I meant for it to be filled with sarcasm. They're fanatics. . ."

Emilie reached for the door knob. "I'll be going," she said, "since you won't be needing a babysitter after all."

Jeannie put her hands on her hips and lashed out with her tongue, but Emilie didn't wait to hear what she was saying. She closed the door and stepped out into the bitter cold, her thoughts quickly sorting themselves out as she walked.

"You stupid little fool!" she chided herself aloud. "Everything you've tried has brought you only sorrow and remorse. It doesn't satisfy; it doesn't! It never has and it never will."

By now she was running. The wind whined and moaned and whistled above her. It stung her cheeks and bit icily at her fingers but she didn't pay any attention. At last she had gotten her directions; the path ahead was narrow and straight. But she would take it again and travel it for the rest of her life. The things which she had thought would be a thrill had left her empty and void and unhappy.

Seeing a bus in the distance, she stumbled forward. By the time the driver let her out in front of the church, she was just in time for the altar call.

Sobbing brokenly and pausing long enough to touch her dear father and mother's arm, she ran down the aisle to the altar, a prodigal come home. This time it was for all of time and eternity.

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THE END