

# Tempest



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Snowflakes hissed against the locomotive like spent souls spinning into hell. Black smoke rising from the funneled stack presaged the coming night to the six short, wooden passenger cars it covered. Steam from a hundred loose fittings wrapped the legs of well-wishers come to wave goodbye in fleeting wet warmth as the conductor bellowed and stepped aboard, swung his lamp, and closed the door against the cold wind. And at last, the whistle shrieked over the ominous, exciting thud of pistons driving the great

wheels and the squeal of iron on iron in the excruciatingly slow transition from dead stop to barely moving.

No one had come to wave good-bye to the woman who settled into the third seat in the second car. Lines of weariness marred her strong, sensuous face and made her look older than her twenty years. White gold hair with the merest miraculous hint of auburn, untamed by pins and ribbons, spilled from underneath her wool bonnet and cascaded down her neck and shoulders like a sunrise. Heavily dressed against the cold, only her face was visible. Only later, when the stoves at either end of the drafty car chased the heaviest chill from the air, did she remove her scarf and open her coat to reveal a heavy, dark green velvet dress that couldn't totally disguise the delicate, sweet curves of her body.

Wind-driven snow rushed by outside the window. The woman stared slightly up and to her right at the swaying lantern. A drummer seated across the aisle buried himself in a newspaper and tried not to look at her. Two seats ahead, unnoticed by her, a small boy peered over the back of his seat. The lantern swayed, the stoves glowed a bright, almost useless red, the wheels underneath went clunkety-clunk, clunkety-clunk. The sound faded when the train went over a trestle, then returned in full force, reflected upward by the frozen ground.

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