

was the image and that it had been for years. But he was not looking at her as at a woman. He had forgotten where he was and on what errand, he was held by a child's sensation of joy in the immediate moment, by the delight of the unexpected and undiscovered, he was held by the astonishment of realizing how seldom he came upon a sight he truly liked, liked in complete acceptance and for its own sake, he was looking up at her with a faint smile, as he would have looked at a statue or a landscape, and what he felt was the sheer pleasure of the sight, the purest esthetic pleasure he had ever experienced.

He saw a switchman going by and he asked, pointing, "Who is that?"

"Dagny Taggart," said the man, walking on.

Rearden felt as if the words struck him inside his throat. He felt the start of a current that cut his breath for a moment, then went slowly down his body, carrying in its wake a sense of weight, a drained heaviness that left him no capacity but one. He was aware—with an abnormal clarity—of the place, the woman's name, and everything it implied, but all of it had receded into some outer ring and had become a pressure that left him alone in the center, as the ring's meaning and essence—and his only reality was the desire to have this woman, now, here, on top of the flatcar in the open sun—to have her before a word was spoken between them, as the first act of their meeting, because it would say everything and because they had earned it long ago.

She turned her head. In the slow curve of the movement, her eyes came to his and stopped. He felt certain that she saw the nature of his glance, that she was held by it, yet did not name it to herself. Her eyes moved on and he saw her speak to some man who stood beside the flatcar, taking notes.

Two things struck him together: his return to his normal reality, and the shattering impact of guilt. He felt a moment's approach to that which no man may feel fully and survive: a sense of self-hatred—the more terrible because some part of him refused to accept it and made him feel guiltier. It was not a progression of words, but the instantaneous verdict of an emotion, a verdict that told him: This, then, was his nature, this was his depravity—that the shameful desire he had never been able to conquer, came to him in response to the only sight of beauty he had found, that it came with a violence he had not known to be possible, and that the only freedom now left to him was to hide it, and to despise himself, but never to be rid of it so long as he and this woman were alive.

He did not know how long he stood there or what devastation that span of time left within him. All that he could preserve was the will to decide that she must never know it.

He waited until she had descended to the ground and the man with the notes had departed; then he approached her and said coldly:

"Miss Taggart? I am Henry Rearden."

"Oh!" It was just a small break, then he heard the quietly natural "How do you do, Mr. Rearden."

He knew, not admitting it to himself, that the break came from

some faint equivalent of his own feeling: she was glad that a face she had liked belonged to a man she could admire. When he proceeded to speak to her about business, his manner was more harshly abrupt than it had ever been with any of his masculine customers.

Now, looking from the memory of the girl on the flatcar to the Gift Certificate lying on his desk, he felt as if the two met in a single shock, fusing all the days and doubts he had lived between them, and, by the glare of the explosion, in a moment's vision of a final sum, he saw the answer to all his questions.

He thought: Guilty?—guiltier than I had known, far guiltier than I had thought, that day—guilty of the evil of damning as guilt that which was my best. I damned the fact that my mind and body were a unit, and that my body responded to the values of my mind. I damned the fact that joy is the core of existence, the motive power of every living being, that it is the need of one's body as it is the goal of one's spirit, that my body was not a weight of inanimate muscles, but an instrument able to give me an experience of superlative joy to unite my flesh and my spirit. That capacity, which I damned as shameful, had left me indifferent to sluts, but gave me my one desire in answer to a woman's greatness. That desire, which I damned as obscene, did not come from the sight of her body, but from the knowledge that the lovely form I saw did express the spirit I was seeing—it was not her body that I wanted, but her person—it was not the girl in gray that I had to possess, but the woman who ran a railroad.

But I damned my body's capacity to express what I felt, I damned, as an affront to her, the highest tribute I could give her just as they damn my ability to translate the work of my mind into Rearden Metal, just as they damn me for the power to transform matter to serve my needs. I accepted their code and believed, as they taught me, that the values of one's spirit must remain as an impotent longing, unexpressed in action, untranslated into reality, while the life of one's body must be lived in misery, as a senseless, degrading performance, and those who attempt to enjoy it must be branded as inferior animals.

I broke their code, but I fell into the trap they intended, the trap of a code devised to be broken. I took no pride in my rebellion, I took it as guilt, I did not damn them, I damned myself. I did not damn their code, I damned existence—and I hid my happiness as a shameful secret. I should have lived it openly, as of our right—or made her my wife, as in truth she was. But I branded my happiness as evil and made her bear it as a disgrace. What they want to do to her now, I did it first. I made it possible.

I did it—in the name of pity for the most contemptible woman I know. That, too, was their code, and I accepted it. I believed that one person owes a duty to another with no payment for it in return. I believed that it was my duty to love a woman who gave me nothing, who betrayed everything I lived for, who demanded her happiness at the price of mine. I believed that love is some static gift which, once granted, need no longer be deserved—just as they believe that wealth is a static possession which can be seized and held without