

"I'm not so sure that his oil fields are such a beneficial achievement. It seems to me that he's dislocated the economy of the whole country. Nobody expected Colorado to become an industrial state. How can we have any security or plan anything if everything changes all the time?"

"Good God, Jim! He's—"

"Yes, I know I know, he's making money. But that is not the standard it seems to me, by which one gauges a man's value to society. And as for his oil, he'd come crawling to us, and he'd wait his turn along with all the other shippers, and he wouldn't demand more than his fair share of transportation—if it weren't for the Phoenix-Durango. We can't help it if we're up against destructive competition of that kind. Nobody can blame us."

The pressure in his chest and temples, thought Eddie Willers, was the strain of the effort he was making; he had decided to make the issue clear for once and the issue was so clear, he thought, that nothing could bar it from Taggart's understanding, unless it was the failure of his own presentation. So he had tried hard, but he was failing, just as he had always failed in all of their discussions, no matter what he said, they never seemed to be talking about the same subject.

"Jim, what are you saying? Does it matter that nobody blames us—when the road is falling apart?"

James Taggart smiled, it was a thin smile, amused and cold. "It's touching, Eddie," he said. "It's touching your devotion to Taggart Transcontinental. If you don't look out you'll turn into one of those real feudal serfs."

"That's what I am Jim."

But may I ask whether it is your job to discuss these matters with me?"

"No, it isn't."

"Then why don't you learn that we have departments to take care of things? Why don't you report all this to whoever's concerned? Why don't you cry on my dear sister's shoulder?"

"Look, Jim, I know it's not my place to talk to you. But I can't understand what's going on. I don't know what it is that your proper advisers tell you or why they can't make you understand. So I thought I'd try to tell you myself."

"I appreciate our childhood friendship, Eddie, but do you think that that should entitle you to walk in here unannounced whenever you wish? Considering your own rank, shouldn't you remember that I am president of Taggart Transcontinental?"

This was wasted. Eddie Willers looked at him as usual, not hurt, merely puzzled, and asked, "Then you don't intend to do anything about the Rio Norte Line?"

"I haven't said that. I haven't said that at all." Taggart was looking at the map, at the red streak south of El Paso. "Just as soon as the San Sebastián Mine gets going and our Mexican branch begins to pay off—"

"Don't let's talk about that, Jim!"

Taggart turned, startled by the unprecedented phenomenon of an implacable anger in Eddie's voice "What's the matter?"

"You know what's the matter Your sister said—"

"Damn my sister!" said James Taggart.

Eddie Willers did not move He did not answer. He stood looking straight ahead But he did not see James Taggart or anything in the office.

After a moment, he bowed and walked out

In the anteroom, the clerks of James Taggart's personal staff were switching off the lights, getting ready to leave for the day But Pop Harper, chief clerk, still sat at his desk, twisting the levers of a half-dismembered typewriter Everybody in the company had the impression that Pop Harper was born in that particular corner at that particular desk and never intended to leave it He had been chief clerk for James Taggart's father

Pop Harper glanced up at Eddie Willers as he came out of the president's office It was a wise, slow glance it seemed to say that he knew that Eddie's visit to their part of the building meant trouble on the line, knew that nothing had come of the visit, and was completely indifferent to the knowledge It was the cynical indifference which Eddie Willers had seen in the eyes of the bum on the street corner

Say, I ddie, know where I could get some woolen undershirts?" he asked "Tried all over town, but nobody's got 'em."

"I don't know," said Eddie stopping "Why do you ask me?"

"I just ask everybody. Maybe somebody'll tell me."

Eddie looked uneasily at the blank emaciated face and white hair

"It's cold in this joint" said Pop Harper "It's going to be colder this winter."

"What are you doing?" Eddie asked pointing at the pieces of typewriter

"The damn thing's busted again. No use sending it out, took them three months to fix it the last time. I thought I'd patch it up myself Not for long, I guess." He let his fist drop down on the keys. "You're ready for the junk pile, old pal. Your days are numbered."

Eddie started That was the sentence he had tried to remember Your days are numbered But he had forgotten in what connection he had tried to remember it

"It's no use, Eddie," said Pop Harper

"What's no use?"

"Nothing. Anything."

"What's the matter, Pop?"

"I'm not going to requisition a new typewriter The new ones are made of tin When the old ones go, that will be the end of typewriting There was an accident in the subway this morning, their brakes wouldn't work You ought to go home, Eddie, turn on the radio and listen to a good dance band Forget it, boy Trouble with you is you never had a hobby. Somebody stole the electric light bulbs again, from off the staircase, down where I live. I've got a pain in my chest. Couldn't get any cough drops this morning, the drugstore on our corner went bankrupt last week The Texas-Western Railroad went

bankrupt last month They closed the Queensborough Bridge yesterday for temporary repairs Oh well, what's the use? Who is John Galt?"

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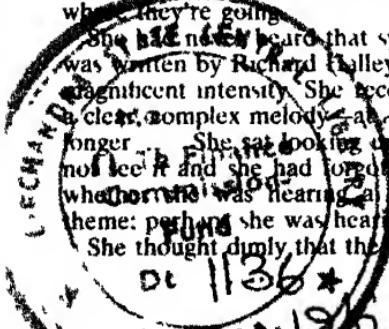
She sat at the window of the train, her head thrown back, one leg stretched across to the empty seat before her The window frame trembled with the speed of the motion, the pane hung over empty darkness, and dots of light slashed across the glass as luminous streaks once in a while

Her leg, sculptured by the tight sheen of the stocking, its long line running straight, over an arched instep, to the tip of a foot in a high-heeled pump, had a feminine elegance that seemed out of place in the dusty train car and oddly incongruous with the rest of her She wore a battered camel's hair coat that had been expensive, wrapped shapelessly about her slender nervous body The coat collar was raised to the slanting brim of her hat A sweep of brown hair fell back, almost touching the line of her shoulders Her face was made of angular planes, the shape of her mouth clear-cut, a sensual mouth held closed with inflexible precision She kept her hands in the coat pockets, her posture taut as if she resented immobility, and unseemly, as if she were unconscious of her own body and that it was a woman's body

She sat listening to the music It was a symphony of triumph The notes flowed up they spoke of rising and they were the rising itself, they were the essence and the form of upward motion they seemed to embody every human act and thought that had ascent as its motive It was a sunburst of sound breaking out of fading and spreading open It had the freedom of release and the tension of purpose It swept space clean and left nothing but the joy of an unobstructed effort Only a faint echo within the sounds spoke of that from which the music had escaped but spoke in laughing astonishment at the discovery that there was no ugliness or pain and there never had had to be It was the song of an immense deliverance

She thought For just a few moments- while this lasts—it is all right to surrender completely —to forget everything and just permit yourself to feel She thought Let go —drop the controls— this is it

Somewhere on the edge of her mind, under the music, she heard the sound of train wheels They knocked in an even rhythm, every fourth knock accented, as if stressing a conscious purpose She could relax because she heard the wheels She listened to the symphony, thinking This is why the wheels have to be kept going, and this is where they're going

She had never heard that symphony before but she knew that it was written by Richard Halle She recognized the violence and the magnificent intensity She recognized the style of the theme, it was a clear, complex melody at a time when no one wrote melody any longer She sat looking up at the ceiling of the car, but she did not see it and she had forgotten where she was She did not know whether she was hearing a full symphony orchestra or only the theme; perhaps she was hearing the orchestration in her own mind She thought dimly that there had been premonitory echoes of this