

and she felt the warmth of the sun in the skin of his legs against hers. They looked far out into the distance, but they saw nothing ahead except a haze of light.

When Francisco left, that summer, she thought that his departure was like the crossing of a frontier which ended his childhood: he was to start college, that fall. Her turn would come next. She felt an eager impatience touched by the excitement of fear; as if he had leaped into an unknown danger. It was like the moment, years ago, when she had seen him dive first from a rock into the Hudson, had seen him vanish under the black water and had stood, knowing that he would reappear in an instant and that it would then be her turn to follow.

She dismissed the fear; dangers, to Francisco, were merely opportunities for another brilliant performance; there were no battles he could lose, no enemies to beat him. And then she thought of a remark she had heard a few years earlier. It was a strange remark — and it was strange that the words had remained in her mind, even though she had thought them senseless at the time. The man who said it was an old professor of mathematics, a friend of her father, who came to their country house for just that one visit. She liked his face, and she could still see the peculiar sadness in his eyes when he said to her father one evening, sitting on the terrace in the fading light, pointing to Francisco's figure in the garden, "That boy is vulnerable. He has too great a capacity for joy. What will he do with it in a world where there's so little occasion for it?"

Francisco went to a great American school, which his father had chosen for him long ago. It was the most distinguished institution of learning left in the world, the Patrick Henry University of Cleveland. He did not come to visit her in New York, that winter, even though he was only a night's journey away. They did not write to each other, they had never done it. But she knew that he would come back to the country for one summer month.

There were a few times, that winter, when she felt an undefined apprehension: the professor's words kept returning to her mind, as a warning which she could not explain. She dismissed them. When she thought of Francisco, she felt the steadying assurance that she would have another month as an advance against the future, as a proof that the world she saw ahead was real, even though it was not the world of those around her.

"Hi, Slug!"

"Hi, Frisco!"

Standing on the hillside, in the first moment of seeing him again, she grasped suddenly the nature of that world which they, together, held against all others. It was only an instant's pause, she felt her cotton skirt beating in the wind against her knees, felt the sun on her eyelids, and the upward thrust of such an immense relief that she ground her feet into the grass under her sandals, because she thought she would rise, weightless, through the wind.

It was a sudden sense of freedom and safety—because she realized that she knew nothing about the events of his life, had never known and would never need to know. The world of chance—of families,

meals, schools, people, of aimless people dragging the load of some unknown guilt—was not theirs, could not change him, could not matter. He and she had never spoken of things that happened to them, but only of what they thought and of what they would do. She looked at him silently, as if a voice within her were saying: Not the things that are, but the things we'll make. We are not to be stopped, you and I. Forgive me the fear if I thought I could lose you to them; forgive me the doubt, they'll never reach you—I'll never be afraid for you again.

He, too, stood looking at her for a moment—and it seemed to her that it was not a look of greeting after an absence, but the look of someone who had thought of her every day of that year. She could not be certain, it was only an instant so brief that just as she caught it he was turning to point at the birch tree behind him and saying in the tone of their childhood game:

"I wish you'd learn to run faster. I'll always have to wait for you."
"Will you wait for me?" she asked gaily.

He answered, without smiling, "Always."

As they went up the hill to the house, he spoke to Eddie, while she walked silently by his side. She felt that there was a new reticence between them which, strangely, was a new kind of intimacy.

She did not question him about the university. Days later, she asked him only whether he liked it.

"They're teaching a lot of drivel nowadays," he answered, "but there are a few courses I like."

"Have you made any friends there?"

"Two."

He told her nothing else.

Jim was approaching his senior year in a college in New York. His studies had given him a manner of odd, quavering belligerence, as if he had found a new weapon. He addressed Francisco once, without provocation, stopping him in the middle of the lawn to say in a tone of aggressive self-righteousness:

"I think that now that you've reached college age, you ought to learn something about ideals. It's time to forget your selfish greed and give some thought to your social responsibilities, because I think that all those millions you're going to inherit are not for your personal pleasure; they are a trust for the benefit of the underprivileged and the poor, because I think that the person who doesn't realize this is the most depraved type of human being."

Francisco answered courteously, "It is not advisable, James, to venture unsolicited opinions. You should spare yourself the embarrassing discovery of their exact value to your listener."

Dagney asked him, as they walked away, "Are there many men like Jim in the world?"

Francisco laughed. "A great many."

"Don't you mind it?"

"No. I don't have to deal with them. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I think they're dangerous in some way. I don't know how."

"Good God, Dagny! Do you expect me to be afraid of an object like James?"

It was days later when they were alone, walking through the woods on the shore of the river, that she asked

"Francisco what's the most depraved type of human being?"

"The man without a purpose"

She was looking at the straight shafts of the trees that stood against the great, sudden, shining spread of space beyond. The forest was dim and cool, but the outer branches caught the hot silver sun rays from the water. She wondered why she enjoyed the sight, when she had never taken any notice of the country around her, why she was so aware of her enjoyment, of her movements, of her body in the process of walking. She did not want to look at Francisco. She felt that his presence seemed more intensely real when she kept her eyes away from him, almost as if the stressed awareness of herself came from him, like the sunlight from the water.

"You think you're good, don't you?" he asked.

"I always did," she answered defiantly without turning.

"Well, let me see you prove it. Let me see how far you'll rise with Taggart Transcontinental. No matter how good you are, I'll expect you to wring everything you've got, trying to be still better. And when you've worn yourself out to reach a goal, I'll expect you to start for another."

"Why do you think that I care to prove anything to you?" she asked.

"Want me to answer?"

"No," she whispered, her eyes fixed upon the other shore of the river in the distance.

She heard him chuckling and after a while he said, "Dagny, there's nothing of any importance in life except how well you do your work. Nothing. Only that. Whatever else you are, will come from that. It's the only measure of human value. All the codes of ethics they'll try to ram down your throat are just so much paper money put out by swindlers to fleece people of their virtues. The code of competence is the only system of morality that's on a gold standard. When you grow up, you'll know what I mean."

"I know it now. But Francisco, why are you and I the only ones who seem to know it?"

"Why should you care about the others?"

"Because I like to understand things, and there's something about people that I can't understand."

"What?"

"Well, I've always been unpopular in school and it didn't bother me, but now I've discovered the reason. It's an impossible kind of reason. They dislike me, not because I do things badly, but because I do them well. They dislike me because I've always had the best grades in class. I don't even have to study. I always get A's. Do you suppose I should try to get D's for a change and become the most popular girl in school?"

Francisco stopped, looked at her and slapped her face.

What she felt was contained in a single instant, while the ground