

its one permanent victory: he had never allowed it to make him lose the desire for joy. He had never doubted the nature of the world or man's greatness as its motive power and its core. Years ago, he had wondered with contemptuous incredulity about the fanatical sects that appeared among men in the dark corners of history, the sects who believed that man was trapped in a malevolent universe ruled by evil for the sole purpose of his torture. Tonight, he knew what their vision of the world and their feel of it had been. If what he now saw around him was the world in which he lived, then he did not want to touch any part of it, he did not want to fight it, he was an outsider with nothing at stake and no concern for remaining alive much longer.

Dagny and his wish to see her were the only exception left to him. The wish remained. But in a sudden shock, he realized that he felt no desire to sleep with her tonight. That desire—which had never given him a moment's rest, which had been growing, feeding on its own satisfaction—was wiped out. It was an odd impotence, neither of his mind nor of his body. He felt, as passionately as he had ever felt it, that she was the most desirable woman on earth; but what came from it was only a desire to desire her, a wish to feel, not a feeling. The sense of numbness seemed impersonal, as if its root were neither in him nor in her; as if it were the act of sex that now belonged to a realm which he had left.

"Don't get up—stay there—it's so obvious that you've been waiting for me that I want to look at it longer."

He said it, from the doorway of her apartment, seeing her stretched in an armchair, seeing the eager little jolt that threw her shoulders forward as she was about to rise; he was smiling.

He noted—as if some part of him were watching his reactions with detached curiosity—that his smile and his sudden sense of gaiety were real. He grasped a feeling that he had always experienced, but never identified because it had always been absolute and immediate: a feeling that forbade him ever to face her in pain. It was much more than the pride of wishing to conceal his suffering: it was the feeling that suffering must not be granted recognition in her presence, that no form of claim between them should ever be motivated by pain and aimed at pity. It was not pity that he brought here or came here to find.

"Do you still need proof that I'm always waiting for you?" she asked, leaning obediently back in her chair; her voice was neither tender nor pleading, but bright and mocking.

"Dagny, why is it that most women would never admit that, but you do?"

"Because they're never sure that they ought to be wanted. I am."

"I do admire self-confidence."

"Self-confidence was only one part of what I said, Hank."

"What's the whole?"

"Confidence of my value—and yours." He glanced at her as if catching the spark of a sudden thought, and she laughed adding, "I wouldn't be sure of holding a man like Orren Boyle, for instance. He wouldn't want me at all. You would."

"Are you saying," he asked slowly, "that I rose in your estimation when you found that I wanted you?"

"Of course."

"That's not the reaction of most people of being wanted."

"It isn't."

"Most people feel that they rise in their own eyes, if others want them."

"I feel that others live up to me, if they want me. And that is the way you feel, too, Hank, about yourself—whether you admit it or not."

That's not what I said to you then, on that first morning—he thought, looking down at her. She lay stretched out lazily, her face blank, but her eyes bright with amusement. He knew that she was thinking of it and that she knew he was. He smiled, but said nothing else.

As he sat half-stretched on the couch, watching her across the room, he felt at peace—as if some temporary wall had risen between him and the things he had felt on his way here. He told her about his encounter with the man from the State Science Institute, because, even though he knew that the event held danger, an odd, glowing sense of satisfaction still remained from it in his mind.

He chuckled at her look of indignation. "Don't bother being angry at them," he said. "It's no worse than all the rest of what they're doing every day."

"Hank, do you want me to speak to Dr. Stadler about it?"

"Certainly not!"

"He ought to stop it. He could at least do that much."

"I'd rather go to jail. Dr. Stadler? You're not having anything to do with him, are you?"

"I saw him a few days ago."

"Why?"

"In regard to the motor."

"The motor . . . ?" He said it slowly, in a strange way, as if the thought of the motor had suddenly brought back to him a realm he had forgotten. "Dagny . . . the man who invented that motor . . . he did exist, didn't he?"

"Why . . . of course. What do you mean?"

"I mean only that . . . that it's a pleasant thought, isn't it? Even if he's dead now, he was alive once . . . so alive that he designed that motor. . . ."

"What's the matter, Hank?"

"Nothing. Tell me about the motor."

She told him about her meeting with Dr. Stadler. She got up and paced the room, while speaking; she could not lie still, she always felt a surge of hope and of eagerness for action when she dealt with the subject of the motor.

The first thing he noticed were the lights of the city beyond the window: he felt as if they were being turned on, one by one, forming the great skyline he loved; he felt it, even though he knew that the lights had been there all the time. Then he understood that the thing which was returning was within him: the shape coming back drop by

drop was his love for the city. Then he knew that it had come back because he was looking at the city past the taut, slender figure of a woman whose head was lifted eagerly as at a sight of distance, whose steps were a restless substitute for flight. He was looking at her as at a stranger, he was barely aware that she was a woman, but the sight was flowing into a feeling the words for which were: *This* is the world and the core of it, this is what made the city—they go together, the angular shapes of the buildings and the angular lines of a face stripped of everything but purpose—the rising steps of steel and the steps of a being intent upon his goal—this is what they had been, all the men who had lived to invent the lights, the steel, the furnaces, the motors—they were the world, *they*, not the men who crouched in dark corners, half-begging, half-threatening, boastfully displaying their open sores as their only claim on life and virtue—so long as he knew that there existed one man with the bright courage of a new thought, could he give up the world to those others?—so long as he could find a single sight to give him a life-restoring shot of admiration, could he believe that the world belonged to the sores, the moans and the guns?—the men who invented motors did exist, he would never doubt their reality, it was his vision of them that had made the contrast unbearable, so that even the loathing was the tribute of his loyalty to them and to that world which was theirs and his.

"Darling . . ." he said, "darling . . ." like a man awakening suddenly, when he noticed that she had stopped speaking.

"What's the matter, Hank?" she asked softly.

"Nothing . . . Except that you shouldn't have called Stadler." His face was bright with confidence, his voice sounded amused, protective and gentle; she could discover nothing else, he looked as he had always looked, it was only the note of gentleness that seemed strange and new.

"I kept feeling that I shouldn't have," she said, "but I didn't know why."

"I'll tell you why." He leaned forward. "What he wanted from you was a recognition that he was still the Dr. Robert Stadler he should have been, but wasn't and knew he wasn't. He wanted you to grant him your respect, in spite of and in contradiction to his actions. He wanted you to juggle reality for him, so that his greatness would remain, but the State Science Institute would be wiped out, as if it had never existed—and you're the only one who could do it for him."

"Why I?"

"Because you're the victim."

She looked at him, startled. He spoke intently; he felt a sudden, violent clarity of perception, as if a surge of energy were rushing into the activity of sight, fusing the half-seen and half-grasped into a single shape and direction.

"Dagny, they're doing something that we've never understood. They know something which we don't, but should discover. I can't see it fully yet, but I'm beginning to see parts of it. That looker from the State Science Institute was scared when I refused to help him