your guilt, and I—as my pride. I'm more proud of it than of anything I've done, more proud than of building the Line. If I'm asked to name my proudest attainment, I will say: I have slept with Hank Rearden. I had earned it."

When he threw her down on the bed, their bodies met like the two sounds that broke against each other in the air of the room: the sound of his tortured moan and of her laughter.

* *

The rain was invisible in the darkness of the streets, but it hung like the sparkling fringe of a lampshade under the corner light. Fumbling in his pockets, James Taggart discovered that he had lost his handkerchief. He swore half-aloud, with resentful malice, as if the loss, the rain and his head cold were someone's personal conspiracy against him.

There was a thin gruel of mud on the pavements; he felt a gluey suction under his shoe soles and a chill slipping down past his collar. He did not want to walk or to stop. He had no place to go.

Leaving his office, after the meeting of the Board of Directors, he had realized suddenly that there were no other appointments, that he had a long evening ahead and no one to help him kill it. The front pages of the newspapers were screaming of the triumph of the John Galt Line, as the radios had screamed it yesterday and all through the night. The name of Taggart Transcontinental was stretched in headlines across the continent, like its track, and he had smiled in answer to the congratulations. He had smiled, seated at the head of the long table, at the Board meeting, while the Directors spoke about the soaring rise of the Taggart stock on the Exchange, while they cautiously asked to see his written agreement with his sister just in case, they said—and commented that it was fine, it was holeproof, there was no doubt but that she would have to turn the Line over to Taggart Transcontinental at once, they spoke about their brilliant future and the debt of gratitude which the company owed to James Taggart.

He had sat through the meeting, wishing it were over with, so that he could go home. Then he had stepped out into the street and realized that home was the one place where he dared not go tonight. He could not be alone, not in the next few hours, yet there was nobody to call. He did not want to see people. He kept seeing the eyes of the men of the Board when they spoke about his greatness: a sly, filmy look that held contempt for him and, more terrifyingly, for themselves.

He walked, head down, a needle of rain pricking the skin of his neck once in a while. He looked away whenever he passed a newsstand. The papers seemed to shriek at him the name of the John Galt Line, and another name which he did not want to hear: Ragnar Danneskjöld. A ship bound for the People's State of Norway with an Emergency Gift cargo of machine tools had been seized by Ragnar Danneskjöld last night. That story disturbed him in some personal manner which he could not explain. The feeling seemed to have some quality in common with the things he felt about the John Galt Line.

It's because he had a cold, he thought; he wouldn't feel this way if he didn't have a cold; a man couldn't be expected to be in top form when he had a cold—he couldn't help it—what did they expect him to do tonight, sing and dance?—he snapped the question angrily at the unknown judges of his unwitnessed mood. He fumbled for his handkerchief again, cursed and decided that he'd better stop somewhere to buy some paper tissues.

Across the square of what had once been a busy neighborhood, he saw the lighted windows of a dime store, still open hopefully at this late hour. There's another one that will go out of business pretty soon, he thought as he crossed the square; the thought gave him pleasure.

There were glaring lights inside, a few tired salesgirls among a spread of deserted counters, and the screaming of a phonograph record being played for a lone, listless customer in a corner. The music swallowed the sharp edges of Taggart's voice; he asked for paper tissues in a tone which implied that the salesgirl was responsible for his cold. The girl turned to the counter behind her, but turned back once to glance swiftly at his face. She took a packet, but stopped, hesitating, studying him with peculiar curiosity.

"Are you James Taggart?" she asked.

"Yes!" he snapped. "Why?"

"Oh!"

She gasped like a child at a burst of firecrackers, she was looking at him with a glance which he had thought to be reserved only for movie stars.

"I saw your picture in the paper this morning, Mr. Taggart," she said very rapidly, a faint flush appearing on her face and vanishing. "It said what a great achievement it was and how it was really you who had done it all, only you didn't want it to be known."

"Oh," said Taggart. He was smiling.

"You look just like your picture," she said in immense astonishment, and added, "Imagine you walking in here like this, in person!"

"Shouldn't I?" His tone was amused.

"I mean, everybody's talking about it, the whole country, and you're the man who did it—and here you are! I've never seen an important person before. I've never been so close to anything important, I mean to any newspaper news."

He had never had the experience of seeing his presence give color to a place he entered: the girl looked as if she was not tired any longer, as if the dime store had become a scene of drama and wonder.

"Mr. Taggart, is it true, what they said about you in the paper?"

"What did they say?"

"About your secret."

"What secret?"

"Well, they said that when everybody was fighting about your bridge, whether it would stand or not, you didn't argue with them, you just went ahead, because you knew it would stand, when nobody else was sure of it—so the Line was a Taggart project and you were

the guiding spirit behind the scenes, but you kept it secret, because you didn't care whether you got credit for it or not."

He had seen the mimeographed release of his Public Relations Department. "Yes," he said, "it's true." The way she looked at him made him feel as if it were.

"It was wonderful of you, Mr. Taggart."

"Do you always remember what you read in the newspapers, so well, in such detail?"

"Why, yes, I guess so—all the interesting things. The big things. I like to read about them. Nothing big ever happens to me."

She said it gaily, without self-pity. There was a young, determined brusqueness in her voice and movements. She had a head of reddish-brown curls, wide-set eyes, a few freckles on the bridge of an upturned nose. He thought that one would call her face attractive if one ever noticed it, but there was no particular reason to notice it. It was a common little face, except for a look of alertness, of eager interest, a look that expected the world to contain an exciting secret behind every corner.

"Mr. Taggart, how does it feel to be a great man?"

"How does it feel to be a little girl?"

She laughed. "Why, wonderful."

"Then you're better off than I am."

"Oh, how can you say such a—"

"Maybe you're lucky if you don't have anything to do with the big events in the newspapers. Big. What do you call big, anyway?"

"Why . . . important."

"What's important?"

"You're the one who ought to tell me that, Mr. Taggart."

"Nothing's important."

She looked at him incredulously. "You, of all people, saying that tonight of all nights!"

"I don't feel wonderful at all, if that's what you want to know. I've never felt less wonderful in my life."

He was astonished to see her studying his face with a look of concern such as no one had ever granted him. "You're worn out, Mr. Taggart," she said earnestly. "Tell them to go to hell."

"Whom?"

"Whoever's getting you down. It isn't right."

"What isn't?"

"That you should feel this way. You've had a tough time, but you've licked them all, so you ought to enjoy yourself now. You've earned it."

"And how do you propose that I enjoy myself?"

"Oh, I don't know. But I thought you'd be having a celebration tonight, a party with all the big shots, and champagne, and things given to you, like keys to cities, a real swank party like that—instead of walking around all by yourself, shopping for paper handkerchiefs, of all fool things!"

"You give me those handkerchiefs, before you forget them altogether," he said, handing her a dime. "And as to the swank party, did it occur to you that I might not want to see anybody tonight?"