

"It's your acceptance of this place that I want. What good would it do me, to have your physical presence without any meaning? That's the kind of faked reality by which most people cheat themselves of their lives. I'm not capable of it." He turned to go. "And neither are you. Good night, Miss Taggart."

He walked out, into his bedroom, closing the door.

She was past the realm of thought—as she lay in bed in the darkness of her room, unable to think or to sleep—and the moaning violence that filled her mind seemed only a sensation of her muscles, but its tone and its twisting shades were like a pleading cry, which she knew, not as words, but as pain: Let him come here, let him break—let it be damned, all of it, my railroad and his strike and everything we've lived by!—let it be damned, everything we've been and are!—he would, if tomorrow I were to die—then let me die, but tomorrow—let him come here, be it any price he names, I have nothing left that's not for sale to him any longer—is this what it means to be an animal?—it does and I am. . . . She lay on her back, her palms pressed to the sheet at her sides, to stop herself from rising and walking into his room, knowing that she was capable even of that. . . . It's not I, it's a body I can neither endure nor control. . . . But somewhere within her, not as words, but as a radiant point of stillness, there was the presence of the judge who seemed to observe her, not in stern condemnation any longer, but in approval and amusement, as if saying: Your body?—if he were not what you know him to be, would your body bring you to this?—why is it *his* body that you want, and no other?—do you think that you are damning them, the things you both have lived by?—are you damning that which you are honoring in this very moment, by your very desire? . . . She did not have to hear the words, she knew them, she had always known them. . . . After a while, she lost the glow of that knowledge, and there was nothing left but pain and the palms that were pressed to the sheet—and the almost indifferent wonder whether he, too, was awake and fighting the same torture.

She heard no sound in the house and saw no light from his window on the tree trunks outside. After a long while she heard, from the darkness of his room, two sounds that gave her a full answer; she knew that he was awake and that he would not come; it was the sound of a step and the click of a cigarette lighter.

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Richard Halley stopped playing, turned away from the piano and glanced at Dagny. He saw her drop her face with the involuntary movement of hiding too strong an emotion, he rose, smiled and said softly, "Thank you."

"Oh no . . ." she whispered, knowing that the gratitude was hers and that it was futile to express it. She was thinking of the years when the works he had just played for her were being written, here, in his small cottage on a ledge of the valley, when all this prodigal magnificence of sound was being shaped by him as a flowing monument to a concept which equates the sense of life with the sense of beauty—while she had walked through the streets of New York in a hopeless quest for some form of enjoyment, with the screeches of

a modern symphony running after her, as if spit by the infected throat of a loud-speaker coughing its malicious hatred of existence.

"But I mean it," said Richard Halley, smiling. "I'm a businessman and I never do anything without payment. You've paid me. Do you see why I wanted to play for you tonight?"

She raised her head. He stood in the middle of his living room, they were alone, with the window open to the summer night, to the dark trees on a long sweep of ledges descending toward the glitter of the valley's distant lights.

"Miss Taggart, how many people are there to whom my work means as much as it does to you?"

"Not many," she answered simply, neither as boast nor flattery, but as an impersonal tribute to the exacting values involved.

"That is the payment I demand. Not many can afford it. I don't mean your enjoyment, I don't mean your emotion—emotions be damned!—I mean your *understanding* and the fact that your enjoyment was of the same nature as mine, that it came from the same source: from your intelligence, from the conscious judgment of a mind able to judge my work by the standard of the same values that went to write it—I mean, not the fact that you *felt*, but that you felt what *I* wished you to feel, not the fact that you admire my work, but that you admire it for the things *I* wished to be admired." He chuckled. "There's only one passion in most artists more violent than their desire for admiration: their fear of identifying the nature of such admiration as they do receive. But it's a fear I've never shared. I do not fool myself about my work or the response I seek—I value both too highly. I do not care to be admired causelessly, emotionally, intuitively, instinctively—or blindly. I do not care for blindness in any form, I have too much to show—or for deafness, I have too much to say. I do not care to be admired by anyone's *heart*—only by someone's *head*. And when I find a customer with that invaluable capacity, then my performance is a mutual trade to mutual profit. An artist is a trader, Miss Taggart, the hardest and most exacting of all traders. Now do you understand me?"

"Yes," she said incredulously, "I do," incredulously because she was hearing her own symbol of moral pride, chosen by a man she had least expected to choose it.

"If you do, why did you look quite so tragic just a moment ago? What is it that you regret?"

"The years when your work has remained unheard."

"But it hasn't. I've given two or three concerts every year. Here, in Galt's Gulch. I am giving one next week. I hope you'll come. The price of admission is twenty-five cents."

She could not help laughing. He smiled, then his face slipped slowly into earnestness, as under the tide of some unspoken contemplation of his own. He looked at the darkness beyond the window, at a spot where, in a clearing of the branches, with the moonlight draining its color, leaving only its metallic luster, the sign of the dollar hung like a curve of shining steel engraved on the sky.

"Miss Taggart, do you see why I'd give three dozen modern artists for one real businessman? Why I have much more in common with