

scious at the western portal of the tunnel this morning, and who appears to be the sole survivor of the catastrophe. Through some astounding infraction of safety rules—in circumstances not yet fully established—the Comet, westbound for San Francisco, was sent into the tunnel with a coal-burning steam locomotive. The Taggart Tunnel, an eight-mile bore, cut through the summit of the Rocky Mountains and regarded as an engineering achievement not to be equaled in our time, was built by the grandson of Nathaniel Taggart, in the great age of the clean, smokeless Diesel-electric engine. The tunnel's ventilation system was not designed to provide for the heavy smoke and fumes of coal-burning locomotives—and it was known to every railroad employee in the district that to send a train into the tunnel with such a locomotive would mean death by suffocation for everyone aboard. The Comet, none the less, was so ordered to proceed. According to Fireman Beal, the effects of the fumes began to be felt when the train was about three miles inside the tunnel. Engineer Joseph Scott threw the throttle wide open, in a desperate attempt to gain speed, but the old, worn engine was inadequate for the weight of the long train and the rising grade of the track. Struggling through the thickening fumes, engineer and fireman had barely managed to force the leaking steam boilers up to a speed of forty miles per hour—when some passenger, prompted undoubtedly by the panic of choking, pulled the emergency brake cord. The sudden jolt of the stop apparently broke the engine's airhose, for the train could not be started again. There were screams coming from the cars. Passengers were breaking windows. Engineer Scott struggled frantically to make the engine start, but collapsed at the throttle, overcome by the fumes. Fireman Beal leaped from the engine and ran. He was within sight of the western portal, when he heard the blast of the explosion, which is the last thing he remembers. The rest of the story was gathered from railroad employees at Winston Station. It appears that an Army Freight Special, westbound, carrying a heavy load of explosives, had been given no warning about the presence of the Comet on the track just ahead. Both trains had encountered delays and were running off their schedules. It appears that the Freight Special had been ordered to proceed regardless of signals, because the tunnel's signal system was out of order. It is said that in spite of speed regulations and in view of the frequent breakdowns of the ventilating system, it was the tacit custom of all engineers to go full speed while in the tunnel. It appears, as far as can be established at present, that the Comet was stalled just beyond the point where the tunnel makes a sharp curve. It is believed that everyone aboard was dead by that time. It is doubted that the engineer of the Freight Special, turning a curve at eighty miles an hour, would have been able to see, in time, the observation window of the Comet's last car, which was brightly lighted when it left Winston Station. What is known is that the Freight Special crashed into the rear of the Comet. The explosion of the Special's cargo broke windows in a farmhouse five miles away and brought down such a weight of rock upon the tunnel that rescue parties have not yet been able to come within three miles of where either train had been. It is not expected that any survivors will be

found—and it is not believed that the Taggart Tunnel can ever be rebuilt.”

She stood still. She looked as if she were seeing, not the room around her, but the scene in Colorado. Her sudden movement had the abruptness of a convulsion. With the single-tracked rationality of a somnambulist, she whirled to find her handbag, as if it were the only object in existence, she seized it, she whirled to the door and ran.

“Dagny!” he screamed. “Don’t go back!”

The scream had no more power to reach her than if he were calling to her across the miles between him and the mountains of Colorado.

He ran after her, he caught her, seizing her by both elbows, and he cried, “Don’t go back! Dagny! In the name of anything sacred to you, don’t go back!”

She looked as if she did not know who he was. In a contest of physical strength, he could have broken the bones of her arms without effort. But with the force of a living creature fighting for life, she tore herself loose so violently that she threw him off balance for a moment. When he regained his footing, she was running down the hill—running as he had run at the sound of the alarm siren in Rearden’s mills—running to her car on the road below.

* *

His letter of resignation lay on the desk before him—and James Taggart sat staring at it, hunched by hatred. He felt as if his enemy were this piece of paper, not the words on it, but the sheet and the ink that had given the words a material finality. He had always regarded thought and words as inconclusive, but a material shape was that which he had spent his life escaping: a commitment.

He had not decided to resign—not really, he thought; he had dictated the letter for a motive which he identified to himself only as “just in case.” The letter, he felt, was a form of protection; but he had not signed it yet, and that was his protection against the protection. The hatred was directed at whatever had brought him to feel that he would not be able to continue extending this process much longer.

He had received word of the catastrophe at eight o’clock this morning; by noon, he had arrived at his office. An instinct that came from reasons which he knew, but spent his whole effort on not knowing, had told him that he had to be there, this time.

The men who had been his marked cards—in a game he knew how to play—were gone. Clifton Locey was barricaded behind the statement of a doctor who had announced that Mr. Locey was suffering from a heart condition which made it impossible to disturb him at present. One of Taggart’s executive assistants was said to have left for Boston last night, and the other was said to have been called unexpectedly to an unnamed hospital, to the bedside of a father nobody had ever suspected him of having. There was no answer at the home of the chief engineer. The vice-president in charge of public relations could not be found.

Driving through the streets to his office, Taggart had seen the black letters of the headlines. Walking down the corridors of Taggart