

theme in all of Richard Halley's work, through all the years of his long struggle, to the day, in his middle-age, when fame struck him suddenly and knocked him out. This—she thought, listening to the symphony—had been the goal of his struggle. She remembered half-hinted attempts in his music, phrases that promised it, broken bits of melody that started but never quite reached it; when Richard Halley wrote this, he . . . She sat up straight. *When did Richard Halley write this?*

In the same instant, she realized where she was and wondered for the first time where that music came from.

A few steps away, at the end of the car, a brakeman was adjusting the controls of the air-conditioner. He was blond and young. He was whistling the theme of the symphony. She realized that he had been whistling it for some time and that this was all she had heard.

She watched him incredulously for a while, before she raised her voice to ask, "Tell me please what are you whistling?"

The boy turned to her. She met a direct glance and saw an open, eager smile, as if he were sharing a confidence with a friend. She liked his face—its lines were tight and firm, it did not have that look of loose muscles evading the responsibility of a shape, which she had learned to expect in people's faces.

"It's the Halley Concerto," he answered, smiling.

"Which one?"

"The Fifth."

She let a moment pass, before she said slowly and very carefully, "Richard Halley wrote only four concertos."

The boy's smile vanished. It was as if he were jolted back to reality, just as she had been a few moments ago. It was as if a shutter were slammed down, and what remained was a face without expression, impersonal, indifferent and empty.

"Yes, of course," he said. "I'm wrong. I made a mistake."

"Then what was it?"

"Something I heard somewhere."

"What?"

"I don't know."

"Where did you hear it?"

"I don't remember."

She paused helplessly; he was turning away from her without further interest.

"It sounded like a Halley theme," she said. "But I know every note he's ever written and he never wrote that."

There was still no expression, only a faint look of attentiveness on the boy's face, as he turned back to her and asked, "You like the music of Richard Halley?"

"Yes," she said, "I like it very much."

He considered her for a moment, as if hesitating, then he turned away. She watched the expert efficiency of his movements as he went on working. He worked in silence.

She had not slept for two nights, but she could not permit herself to sleep; she had too many problems to consider and not much time: the train was due in New York early in the morning. She needed

the time, yet she wished the train would go faster; but it was the Taggart Comet, the fastest train in the country.

She tried to think; but the music remained on the edge of her mind and she kept hearing it, in full chords, like the implacable steps of something that could not be stopped. . . . She shook her head angrily, jerked her hat off and lighted a cigarette.

She would not sleep, she thought; she could last until tomorrow night. . . . The train wheels clicked in accented rhythm. She was so used to them that she did not hear them consciously, but the sound became a sense of peace within her. . . . When she extinguished her cigarette, she knew that she needed another one, but thought that she would give herself a minute, just a few minutes, before she would light it. . . .

She had fallen asleep and she awakened with a jolt, knowing that something was wrong, before she knew what it was: the wheels had stopped. The car stood soundless and dim in the blue glow of the night lamps. She glanced at her watch: there was no reason for stopping. She looked out the window: the train stood still in the middle of empty fields.

She heard someone moving in a seat across the aisle, and asked, "How long have we been standing?"

A man's voice answered indifferently, "About an hour."

The man looked after her, sleepily astonished, because she leaped to her feet and rushed to the door.

There was a cold wind outside, and an empty stretch of land under an empty sky. She heard weeds rustling in the darkness. Far ahead, she saw the figures of men standing by the engine—and above them, hanging detached in the sky, the red light of a signal.

She walked rapidly toward them, past the motionless line of wheels. No one paid attention to her when she approached. The train crew and a few passengers stood clustered under the red light. They had stopped talking, they seemed to be waiting in placid indifference.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

The engineer turned, astonished. Her question had sounded like an order, not like the amateur curiosity of a passenger. She stood, hands in pockets, coat collar raised, the wind beating, her hair in strands across her face.

"Red light, lady," he said, pointing up with his thumb.

"How long has it been on?"

"An hour."

"We're off the main track, aren't we?"

"That's right."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

The conductor spoke up. "I don't think we had any business being sent off on a siding, that switch wasn't working right, and this thing's not working at all." He jerked his head up at the red light. "I don't think the signal's going to change. I think it's busted."

"Then what are you doing?"

"Waiting for it to change."

In her pause of startled anger, the fireman chuckled. "Last week, the crack special of the Atlantic Southern got left on a siding for two hours—just somebody's mistake."

"This is the Taggart Comet," she said. "The Comet has never been late."

"She's the only one in the country that hasn't," said the engineer.

"There's always a first time," said the fireman.

"You don't know about railroads, lady," said a passenger. "There's not a signal system or a dispatcher in the country that's worth a damn."

She did not turn or notice him, but spoke to the engineer. "If you know that the signal is broken, what do you intend to do?"

He did not like her tone of authority, and he could not understand why she assumed it so naturally. She looked like a young girl; only her mouth and eyes showed that she was a woman in her thirties. The dark gray eyes were direct and disturbing, as if they cut through things, throwing the inconsequential out of the way. The face seemed faintly familiar to him, but he could not recall where he had seen it.

"Lady, I don't intend to stick my neck out," he said.

"He means," said the fireman, "that our job's to wait for orders."

"Your job is to run this train."

"Not against a red light. If the light says stop, we stop."

"A red light means danger, lady," said the passenger.

"We're not taking any chances," said the engineer. "Whoever's responsible for it, he'll switch the blame to us if we move. So we're not moving till somebody tells us to."

"And if nobody does?"

"Somebody will turn up sooner or later."

"How long do you propose to wait?"

The engineer shrugged. "Who is John Galt?"

"He means," said the fireman, "don't ask questions nobody can answer."

She looked at the red light and at the rail that went off into the black, untouched distance.

She said, "Proceed with caution to the next signal. If it's in order, proceed to the main track. Then stop at the first open office."

"Yeah? Who says so?"

"I do."

"Who are you?"

It was only the briefest pause, a moment of astonishment at a question she had not expected, but the engineer looked more closely at her face, and in time with her answer he gasped, "Good God!"

She answered, not offensively, merely like a person who does not hear the question often:

"Dagny Taggart."

"Well, I'll be—" said the fireman, and then they all remained silent.

She went on, in the same tone of unstressed authority. "Proceed to the main track and hold the train for me at the first open office."

"Yes, Miss Taggart."