

goods? Why are they doing everything in their power to make it impossible for her to succeed, when she's all they've got standing between them and destruction? Why are they torturing her in return for saving their lives? . . . What's the matter with you? Why do you look at me like that? . . . Yes, I guess you understand. . . . There's something about it all that I can't define, and it's something evil. That's why I'm afraid. . . . I don't think one can get away with it. . . . You know, it's strange, but I think they know it, too. Jim and his crowd and all of them in the building. There's something guilty and sneaky about the whole place. Guilty and sneaky—and dead. Taggart Transcontinental is now like a man who's lost his soul . . . who's *betrayed* his soul. . . . No, she doesn't care. Last time she was in New York, she came in unexpectedly—I was in my office, in *her* office—and suddenly the door opened and there she was. She came in, saying, 'Mr. Willers, I'm looking for a job as a station operator, would you give me a chance?' I wanted to damn them all, but I had to laugh, I was so glad to see her and she was laughing so happily. She had come straight from the airport—she wore slacks and a flying jacket—she looked wonderful—she'd got windburned, it looked like a suntan, just as if she'd returned from a vacation. She made me remain where I was, in her chair, and she sat on the desk and talked about the new bridge of the John Galt Line. . . . No. No, I never asked her why she chose that name . . . I don't know what it means to her. A sort of challenge, I guess . . . I don't know to whom . . . Oh, it doesn't matter, it doesn't mean a thing, there isn't any John Galt, but I wish she hadn't used it. I don't like it, do you? . . . You do? You don't sound very happy saying it."

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The windows of the offices of the John Galt Line faced a dark alley. Looking up from her desk, Dagny could not see the sky, only the wall of a building rising past her range of vision. It was the side wall of the great skyscraper of Taggart Transcontinental.

Her new headquarters were two rooms on the ground floor of a half-collapsed structure. The structure still stood, but its upper stories were boarded off as unsafe for occupancy. Such tenants as it sheltered were half-bankrupt, existing, as it did, on the inertia of the momentum of the past.

She liked her new place: it saved money. The rooms contained no superfluous furniture or people. The furniture had come from junk shops. The people were the best choice she could find. On her rare visits to New York, she had no time to notice the room where she worked; she noticed only that it served its purpose.

She did not know what made her stop tonight and look at the thin streaks of rain on the glass of the window, at the wall of the building across the alley.

It was past midnight. Her small staff had gone. She was due at the airport at three A.M., to fly her plane back to Colorado. She had little left to do, only a few of Eddie's reports to read. With the sudden break of the tension of hurrying, she stopped, unable to go

on. The reports seemed to require an effort beyond her power. It was too late to go home and sleep, too early to go to the airport. She thought: You're tired—and watched her own mood with severe, contemptuous detachment, knowing that it would pass.

She had flown to New York unexpectedly, at a moment's notice, leaping to the controls of her plane within twenty minutes after hearing a brief item in a news broadcast. The radio voice had said that Dwight Sanders had retired from business, suddenly, without reason or explanation. She had hurried to New York, hoping to find him and stop him. But she had felt, while flying across the continent, that there would be no trace of him to find.

The spring rain hung motionless in the air beyond the window, like a thin mist. She sat, looking across at the open cavern of the Express and Baggage Entrance of the Taggart Terminal. There were naked lights inside, among the steel girders of the ceiling, and a few piles of luggage on the worn concrete of the floor. The place looked abandoned and dead.

She glanced at a jagged crack on the wall of her office. She heard no sound. She knew she was alone in the ruins of a building. It seemed as if she were alone in the city. She felt an emotion held back for years: a loneliness much beyond this moment, beyond the silence of the room and the wet, glistening emptiness of the street; the loneliness of a gray wasteland where nothing was worth reaching; the loneliness of her childhood.

She rose and walked to the window. By pressing her face to the pane, she could see the whole of the Taggart Building, its lines converging abruptly to its distant pinnacle in the sky. She looked up at the dark window of the room that had been her office. She felt as if she were in exile, never to return, as if she were separated from the building by much more than a sheet of glass, a curtain of rain and the span of a few months.

She stood, in a room of crumbling plaster, pressed to the window-pane, looking up at the unattainable form of everything she loved. She did not know the nature of her loneliness. The only words that named it were: This is not the world I expected.

Once, when she was sixteen, looking at a long stretch of Taggart track, at the rails that converged—like the lines of a skyscraper—to a single point in the distance, she had told Eddie Willers that she had always felt as if the rails were held in the hand of a man beyond the horizon—no, not her father or any of the men in the office—and some day she would meet him.

She shook her head and turned away from the window.

She went back to her desk. She tried to reach for the reports. But suddenly she was slumped across the desk, her head on her arm. Don't, she thought; but she did not move to rise, it made no difference, there was no one to see her.

This was a longing she had never permitted herself to acknowledge. She faced it now. She thought: If emotion is one's response to the things the world has to offer, if she loved the rails, the building, and more: if she loved her love for them—there was still one response, the greatest, that she had missed. She thought: To find a