

that what she wanted to wash off was not the dust of the drive from the country, but the feel of the office.

She dressed, lighted a cigarette and walked into the living room, to stand at the window, looking at the city, as she had stood looking at the countryside at the start of this day.

She had said she would give her life for one more year on the railroad. She was back; but this was not the joy of working: it was only the clear, cold peace of a decision reached--and the stillness of unadmitted pain.

Clouds had wrapped the sky and had descended as fog to wrap the streets below, as if the sky were engulfing the city. She could see the whole of Manhattan Island, a long, triangular shape cutting into an invisible ocean. It looked like the prow of a sinking ship: a few tall buildings still rose above it, like funnels, but the rest was disappearing under gray-blue coils, going down slowly into vapor and space. This was how they had gone--she thought--Atlantis, the city that sank into the ocean, and all the other kingdoms that vanished, leaving the same legend in all the languages of men, and the same longing.

She felt--as she had felt it one spring night, slumped across her desk in the crumbling office of the John Galt Line, by a window facing a dark alley--the sense and vision of her own world, which she would never reach. . . . You--she thought--whoever you are, whom I have always loved and never found, you whom I expected to see at the end of the rails beyond the horizon, you whose presence I had always felt in the streets of the city and whose world I had wanted to build, it is my love for you that had kept me moving, my love and my hope to reach you and my wish to be worthy of you on the day when I would stand before you face to face. Now I know that I shall never find you--that it is not to be reached or lived--but what is left of my life is still yours, and I will go on in your name, even though it is a name I'll never learn. I will go on serving you, even though I'm never to win. I will go on, to be worthy of you on the day when I would have met you, even though I won't. . . . She had never accepted hopelessness, but she stood at the window and, addressed to the shape of a fogbound city, it was her self-dedication to unrequited love.

The doorbell rang.

She turned with indifferent astonishment to open the door--but she knew that she should have expected him, when she saw that it was Francisco d'Anconia. She felt no shock and no rebellion, only the cheerless serenity of her assurance--and she raised her head to face him, with a slow, deliberate movement, as if telling him that she had chosen her stand and that she stood in the open.

His face was grave and calm; the look of happiness was gone, but the amusement of the playboy had not returned. He looked as if all masks were down, he looked direct, tightly disciplined, intent upon a purpose, he looked like a man able to know the earnestness of action, as she had once expected him to look--he had never seemed so attractive as he did in this moment--and she noted, in astonish-

ment, her sudden feeling that he was not a man who had deserted her, but a man whom she had deserted.

"Dagny, are you able to talk about it now?"

"Yes—if you wish. Come in."

He glanced briefly at her living room, her home which he had never entered, then his eyes came back to her. He was watching her attentively. He seemed to know that the quiet simplicity of her manner was the worst of all signs for his purpose, that it was like a spread of ashes where no flicker of pain could be revived, that even pain would have been a form of fire.

"Sit down, Francisco."

She remained standing before him, as if consciously letting him see that she had nothing to hide, not even the weariness of her posture, the price she had paid for this day and her carelessness of price.

"I don't think I can stop you now," he said, "if you've made your choice. But if there's one chance left to stop you, it's a chance I have to take."

She shook her head slowly. "There isn't. And—what for, Francisco? You've given up. What difference does it make to you whether I perish with the railroad or away from it?"

"I haven't given up the future."

"What future?"

"The day when the looters will perish, but we won't."

"If Taggart Transcontinental is to perish with the looters, then so am I."

He did not take his eyes off her face and he did not answer.

She added dispassionately, "I thought I could live without it. I can't. I'll never try it again. Francisco, do you remember?—we both believed, when we started, that the only sin on earth was to do things badly. I still believe it." The first note of life shuddered in her voice. "I can't stand by and watch what they did at that tunnel. I can't accept what they're all accepting—Francisco, it's the 'thing' we thought so monstrous, you and I!—the belief that disasters are one's natural fate, to be borne, not fought. I can't accept submission. I can't accept helplessness. I can't accept renunciation. So long as there's a railroad left to run, I'll run it."

"In order to maintain the looters' world?"

"In order to maintain the last strip of mine."

"Dagny," he said slowly, "I know why one loves one's work. I know what it means to you, the job of running trains. But you would not run them if they were empty. Dagny, what is it you see when you think of a moving train?"

She glanced at the city. "The life of a man of ability who might have perished in that catastrophe, but will escape the next one, which I'll prevent—a man who has an intransigent mind and an unlimited ambition, and is in love with his own life . . . the kind of man who is what we were when we started, you and I. You gave him up. I can't."

He closed his eyes for an instant, and the tightening movement of his mouth was a smile, a smile substituting for a moan of understand-