

purpose but his own pleasure?" he asked. "This is the way I want you to wear it. Only for me. I like to look at it. It's beautiful."

She laughed; it was a soft, low, breathless sound. She could not speak or move, only nod silently in acceptance and obedience; she nodded several times, her hair swaying with the wide, circular movement of her head, then hanging still as she kept her head bowed to him.

She dropped down on the bed. She lay stretched lazily, her head thrown back, her arms at her sides, palms pressed to the rough texture of the bedspread, one leg bent, the long line of the other extended across the dark blue linen of the spread, the stone glowing like a wound in the semi-darkness, throwing a star of rays against her skin.

Her eyes were half-closed in the mocking, conscious triumph of being admired, but her mouth was half-open in helpless, begging expectation. He stood across the room, looking at her, at her flat stomach drawn in, as her breath was drawn, at the sensitive body of a sensitive consciousness. He said, his voice low, intent and oddly quiet:

"Dagny, if some artist painted you as you are now, men would come to look at the painting to experience a moment that nothing could give them in their own lives. They would call it great art. They would not know the nature of what they felt, but the painting would show them everything—even that you're not some classical Venus, but the Vice-President of a railroad, because that's part of it— even what I am, because that's part of it, too. Dagny, they'd feel it and go away and sleep with the first barmaid in sight—and they'd never try to reach what they had felt. I wouldn't want to seek it from a painting. I'd want it real. I'd take no pride in any hopeless longing. I wouldn't hold a stillborn aspiration. I'd want to have it, to make it, to live it. Do you understand?"

"Oh yes, Hank, I understand!" she said. Do you, my darling? -- do you understand it fully?--she thought, but did not say it aloud.

On the evening of a blizzard, she came home to find an enormous spread of tropical flowers standing in her living room against the dark glass of windows battered by snowflakes. They were stems of Hawaiian Torch Ginger, three feet tall, their large heads were cones of petals that had the sensual texture of soft leather and the color of blood. "I saw them in a florist's window," he told her when he came, that night. "I liked seeing them through a blizzard. But there's nothing as wasted as an object in a public window."

She began to find flowers in her apartment at unpredictable times, flowers sent without a card, but with the signature of the sender in their fantastic shapes, in the violent colors, in the extravagant cost. He brought her a gold necklace made of small hinged squares that formed a spread of solid gold to cover her neck and shoulders, like the color of a knight's armor—"Wear it with a black dress," he ordered. He brought her a set of glasses that were tall, slender blocks of square-cut crystal, made by a famous jeweler. She watched the way he held one of the glasses when she served him a drink—as if the touch of the texture under his fingers, the taste of the drink and

the sight of her face were the single form of an indivisible moment of enjoyment. "I used to see things I liked," he said, "but I never bought them. There didn't seem to be much meaning in it. There is, now."

He telephoned her at the office, one winter morning, and said, not in the tone of an invitation, but in the tone of an executive's order. "We're going to have dinner together tonight. I want you to dress. Do you have any sort of blue evening gown? Wear it."

The dress she wore was a slender tunic of dusty blue that gave her a look of unprotected simplicity, the look of a statue in the blue shadows of a garden under the summer sun. What he brought and put over her shoulders was a cape of blue fox that swallowed her from the curve of her chin to the tips of her sandals. "Hank, that's preposterous"—she laughed—"it's not my kind of thing!" "No?" he asked, drawing her to a mirror.

The huge blanket of fur made her look like a child bundled for a snowstorm; the luxurious texture transformed the innocence of the awkward bundle into the elegance of a perversely intentional contrast: into a look of stressed sensuality. The fur was a soft brown, dimmed by an aura of blue that could not be seen, only felt like an enveloping mist, like a suggestion of color grasped not by one's eyes but by one's hands, as if one felt, without contact, the sensation of sinking one's palms into the fur's softness. The cape left nothing to be seen of her, except the brown of her hair, the blue-gray of her eyes, the shape of her mouth.

She turned to him, her smile startled and helpless. "I . . . I didn't know it would look like that."

"I did."

She sat beside him in his car as he drove through the dark streets of the city. A sparkling net of snow flashed into sight once in a while, when they went past the lights on the corners. She did not ask where they were going. She sat low in the seat, leaning back, looking up at the snowflakes. The fur cape was wrapped tightly about her, within it, her dress felt as light as a nightgown and the feel of the cape was like an embrace.

She looked at the angular tiers of lights rising through the snowy curtain, and—glancing at him, at the grip of his gloved hands on the wheel, at the austere, fastidious elegance of the figure in black overcoat and white muffler—she thought that he belonged in a great city, among polished sidewalks and sculptured stone.

The car went down into a tunnel, streaked through an echoing tube of tile under the river and rose to the coils of an elevated highway under an open black sky. The lights were below them now, spread in flat miles of bluish windows, of smokestacks, slanting cranes, red gusts of fire, and long, dim rays silhouetting the contorted shapes of an industrial district. She thought that she had seen him once, at his mills, with smudges of soot on his forehead, dressed in acid-eaten overalls; he had worn them as naturally well as he wore his formal clothes. He belonged here, too—she thought, looking down at the flats of New Jersey—among the cranes, the fires and the grinding clatter of gears.