

longer. She put on a dark blue suit and—remembering Galt's words—a white, high-collared sweater. She packed a suitcase and a bag with a strap that she could carry swung over her shoulder. She put her jewelry in a corner of the bag, including the bracelet of Rearden Metal she had earned in the outside world, and the five-dollar gold piece she had earned in the valley.

It was easy to leave the apartment and to lock the door, even though she knew she would probably never open it again. It seemed harder, for a moment, when she came to her office. No one had seen her come in; the anteroom of her office was empty; the great Taggart Building seemed unusually quiet. She stood looking for a moment at this room and at all the years it had contained. Then she smiled—no, it was not too hard, she thought; she opened her safe and took the documents she had come here to get. There was nothing else that she wanted to take from her office—except the picture of Nathaniel Taggart and the map of Taggart Transcontinental. She broke the two frames, folded the picture and the map, and slipped them into her suitcase.

She was locking the suitcase, when she heard the sound of hurrying steps. The door flew open and the chief engineer rushed in; he was shaking; his face was distorted.

"Miss Taggart!" he cried. "Oh, thank God, Miss Taggart, you're here! We've been calling for you all over!"

She did not answer; she looked at him inquiringly.

"Miss Taggart, have you heard?"

"What?"

"Then you haven't! Oh God, Miss Taggart, it's . . . I can't believe it, I still can't believe it, but . . . Oh God, what are we going to do? The . . . the Taggart Bridge is gone!"

She stared at him, unable to move.

"It's gone! Blown up! Blown up, apparently, in one second! Nobody knows for certain what happened—but it looks like . . . they think that something went wrong at Project X and . . . it looks like those sound rays, Miss Taggart! We can't get through to any point within a radius of a hundred miles! It's not possible, it can't be possible, but it looks as if everything in that circle has been wiped out! . . . We can't get any answers! Nobody can get an answer—the newspapers, the radio stations, the police! We're still checking, but the stories that are coming from the rim of that circle are—" He shuddered. "Only one thing is certain: the bridge is gone! Miss Taggart! We don't know what to do!"

She leaped to her desk and seized the telephone receiver. Her hand stopped in mid-air. Then, slowly, twistedly, with the greatest effort ever demanded of her, she began to move her arm down to place the receiver back. It seemed to her that it took a long time, as if her arm had to move against some atmospheric pressure that no human body could combat—and in the span of these few brief moments, in the stillness of a blinding pain, she knew what Francisco had felt, that night, twelve years ago—and what a boy of twenty-six had felt when he had looked at his motor for the last time.

"Miss Taggart!" cried the chief engineer. "We don't know what to do!"

The receiver clicked softly back into its cradle. "I don't, either," she answered.

In a moment, she knew it was over: She heard her voice telling the man to check further and report to her later—and she waited for the sound of his steps to vanish in the echoing silence of the hall.

Crossing the concourse of the Terminal for the last time, she glanced at the statue of Nathaniel Taggart—and remembered a promise she had made. It would be only a symbol now, she thought, but it would be the kind of farewell that Nathaniel Taggart deserved. She had no other writing instrument, so she took the lipstick from her bag and, smiling up at the marble face of the man who would have understood, she drew a large sign of the dollar on the pedestal under his feet.

She was first to reach the corner, two blocks east of the Terminal entrance. As she waited, she observed the first trickles of the panic that was soon to engulf the city: there were automobiles driving too fast, some of them loaded with household effects, there were too many police cars speeding by, and too many sirens bursting in the distance. The news of the destruction of the Bridge was apparently spreading through the city; they would know that the city was doomed and they would start a stampede to escape—but they had no place to go, and it was not her concern any longer.

She saw Francisco's figure approaching from some distance away; she recognized the swiftness of his walk, before she could distinguish the face under the cap pulled low over his eyes. She caught the moment when he saw her, as he came closer. He waved his arm, with a smile of greeting. Some conscious stress in the sweep of his arm made it the gesture of a d'Anconia, welcoming the arrival of a long-awaited traveler at the gates of his own domain.

When he approached, she stood solemnly straight and, looking at his face and at the buildings of the greatest city in the world, as at the kind of witnesses she wanted, she said slowly, her voice confident and steady:

"I swear—by my life and my love of it—that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine."

He inclined his head, as if in sign of admittance. His smile was now a salute.

Then he took her suitcase with one hand, her arm with the other, and said, "Come on."

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The unit known as "Project F"—in honor of its originator, Dr. Ferris—was a small structure of reinforced concrete, low on the slope of the hill that supported the State Science Institute on a higher, more public level. Only the small gray patch of the unit's roof could be seen from the Institute's windows, hidden in a jungle of ancient trees; it looked no bigger than the cover of a manhole.

The unit consisted of two stories in the shape of a small cube placed asymmetrically on top of a larger one. The first story had no windows, only a door studded with iron spikes; the second story had