

She moved first. She sprang to her feet—and ran. She ran out of the room, out of the apartment—he heard her running down the hall, tearing open the iron door of the emergency stairway, not waiting to ring for the elevator.

She ran down the stairs, opening doors on random landings, running through the twisting hallways of the building, then down the stairs again, until she found herself in the lobby and ran to the street.

After a while, she saw that she was walking down a littered sidewalk in a dark neighborhood, with an electric bulb glaring in the cave of a subway entrance and a lighted billboard advertising soda crackers on the black roof of a laundry. She did not remember how she had come here. Her mind seemed to work in broken spurts, without connections. She knew only that she had to escape and that escape was impossible.

She had to escape from Jim, she thought Where?—she asked, looking around her with a glance like a cry of prayer. She would have seized upon a job in a five-and-ten, or in that laundry, or in any of the dismal shops she passed. But she would work, she thought, and the harder she worked, the more malevolence she would draw from the people around her, and she would not know when truth would be expected of her and when a lie, but the stricter her honesty, the greater the fraud she would be asked to suffer at their hands. She had seen it before and had borne it, in the home of her family, in the shops of the slums, but she had thought that these were vicious exceptions, chance evils, to escape and forget. Now she knew that they were not exceptions, that theirs was the code accepted by the world, that it was a creed of living, known by all, but kept unnamed, leering at her from people's eyes in that sly, guilty look she had never been able to understand—and at the root of the creed, hidden by silence, lying in wait for her in the cellars of the city and in the cellars of their souls, there was a thing with which one could not live.

Why are you doing it to me?—she cried soundlessly to the darkness around her. Because you're good—some enormous laughter seemed to be answering from the roof tops and from the sewers. Then I won't want to be good any longer—But you will—I don't have to—You will—I can't bear it—You will.

She shuddered and walked faster—but ahead of her, in the foggy distance, she saw the calendar above the roofs of the city—it was long past midnight and the calendar said: August 6, but it seemed to her suddenly that she saw September 2 written above the city in letters of blood—and she thought: If she worked, if she struggled, if she rose, she would take a harder beating with each step of her climb, until, at the end, whatever she reached, be it a copper company or an unmortgaged cottage, she would see it seized by Jim on some September 2 and she would see it vanish to pay for the parties where Jim made his deals with his friends.

Then I won't!—she screamed and whirled around and went running back along the street—but it seemed to her that in the black sky, grinning at her from the steam of the laundry, there weaved an enormous figure that would hold no shape, but its grin remained the same on its changing faces, and its face was Jim's and her childhood

preacher's and the woman social worker's from the personnel department of the five-and-ten—and the grin seemed to say to her: People like you will always stay honest, people like you will always struggle to rise, people like you will always work, so we're safe and you have no choice.

She ran. When she looked around her once more, she was walking down a quiet street, past the glass doorways where lights were burning in the carpeted lobbies of luxurious buildings. She noticed that she was limping, and saw that the heel of her pump was loose; she had broken it, somewhere in her blank span of running.

From the sudden space of a broad intersection, she looked at the great skyscrapers in the distance. They were vanishing quietly into a veil of fog, with the faint breath of a glow behind them, with a few lights like a smile of farewell. Once, they had been a promise, and from the midst of the stagnant sloth around her she had looked to them for proof that another kind of men existed. Now she knew that they were tombstones, slender obelisks soaring in memory of the men who had been destroyed for having created them, they were the frozen shape of the silent cry that the reward of achievement was martyrdom.

Somewhere in one of those vanishing towers, she thought, there was Dagny—but Dagny was a lonely victim, fighting a losing battle, to be destroyed and to sink into fog like the others.

There is no place to go, she thought and stumbled on—I can't stand still, nor move much longer—I can neither work nor rest—I can neither surrender nor fight—but this . . . *this* is what they want of me, *this* is where they want me—neither living nor dead, neither thinking nor insane, but just a chunk of pulp that screams with fear, to be shaped by them as they please, they who have no shape of their own.

She plunged into the darkness behind a corner, shrinking in dread from any human figure. No, she thought, they're not evil, not all people . . . they're only their own first victims, but they all believe in Jim's creed, and I can't deal with them, once I know it . . . and if I spoke to them, they would try to grant me their good will, but I'd know what it is that they hold as the good and I would see death staring out of their eyes.

The sidewalk had shrunk to a broken strip, and splashes of garbage ran over from the cans at the stoops of crumbling houses. Beyond the dusty glow of a saloon, she saw a lighted sign "Young Women's Rest Club" above a locked door.

She knew the institutions of that kind and the women who ran them, the women who said that theirs was the job of helping sufferers. If she went in—she thought, stumbling past—if she faced them and begged them for help, "What is your guilt?" they would ask her. "Drink? Dope? Pregnancy? Shoplifting?" She would answer, "I have no guilt, I am innocent, but I'm—" "Sorry. We have no concern for the pain of the innocent."

She ran. She stopped, regaining her eyesight, on the corner of a long, wide street. The buildings and pavements merged with the sky—and two lines of green lights hung in open space, going off into