

held as a shameful sin . . . the work of dealing with grease, steam and slimy peelings in a reeking kitchen was held to be a spiritual matter, an act of compliance with her moral duty—while the meeting of two bodies in a bedroom was held to be a physical indulgence, an act of surrender to an animal instinct, with no glory, meaning or pride of spirit to be claimed by the animals involved.

She leaped abruptly to her feet. She did not want to think of the outer world or of its moral code. But she knew that that was not the subject of her thoughts. And she did not want to think of the subject her mind was intent on pursuing, the subject to which it kept returning against her will, by some will of its own. . . .

She paced the room, hating the ugly, jerky, uncontrolled looseness of her movements—torn between the need to let her motion break the stillness, and the knowledge that this was not the form of break she wanted. She lighted cigarettes, for an instant's illusion of purposeful action—and discarded them within another instant, feeling the weary distaste of a substitute purpose. She looked at the room like a restless beggar, pleading with physical objects to give her a motive, wishing she could find something to clean, to mend, to polish—while knowing that no task was worth the effort. When nothing seems worth the effort—said some stern voice in her mind—it's a screen to hide a wish that's worth too much; what do you want? . . . She snapped a match, viciously jerking the flame to the tip of a cigarette she noticed hanging, unlighted, in the corner of her mouth. . . . What do you want?—repeated the voice that sounded severe as a judge. I want him to come back!—she answered, throwing the words, as a soundless cry, at some accuser within her, almost as one would throw a bone to a pursuing beast, in the hope of distracting it from pouncing upon the rest.

I want him back—she said softly, in answer to the accusation that there was no reason for so great an impatience. . . . I want him back—she said pleadingly, in answer to the cold reminder that her answer did not balance the judge's scale. . . . I want him back!—she cried defiantly, fighting not to drop the one superfluous, protective word in that sentence.

She felt her head drooping with exhaustion, as after a prolonged beating. The cigarette she saw between her fingers had burned the mere length of half an inch. She ground it out and fell into the armchair again.

I'm not evading it—she thought—I'm not evading it, it's just that I can see no way to any answer. . . . That which you want—said the voice, while she stumbled through a thickening fog—is yours for the taking, but anything less than your full acceptance, anything less than your full conviction, is a betrayal of everything he is. . . . Then let him damn me—she thought, as if the voice were now lost in the fog and would not hear her—let him damn me tomorrow. . . . I want him . . . back. . . . She heard no answer, because her head had fallen softly against the chair; she was asleep.

When she opened her eyes, she saw him standing three feet away, looking down at her, as if he had been watching her for some time.

She saw his face and, with the clarity of undivided perception, she

saw the meaning of the expression on his face: it was the meaning she had fought for hours. She saw it without astonishment, because she had not yet regained her awareness of any reason why it should astonish her.

"This is the way you look," he said softly, "when you fall asleep in your office," and she knew that he, too, was not fully aware of letting her hear it: the way he said it told her how often he had thought of it and for what reason. "You look as if you would awaken in a world where you had nothing to hide or to fear," and she knew that the first movement of her face had been a smile, she knew it in the moment when it vanished, when she grasped that they were both awake. He added quietly, with full awareness, "But here, it's true."

Her first emotion of the realm of reality was a sense of power. She sat up with a flowing, leisurely movement of confidence, feeling the flow of the motion from muscle to muscle through her body. She asked, and it was the slowness, the sound of casual curiosity, the tone of taking the implications for granted, that gave to her voice the faintest sound of disdain, "How did you know what I look like in . . . my office?"

"I told you that I've watched you for years."

"How were you able to watch me that thoroughly? From where?"

"I will not answer you now," he said, simply, without defiance.

The slight movement of her shoulder leaning back, the pause, then the lower, huskier tone of her voice, left a hint of smiling triumph to trail behind her words: "When did you see me for the first time?"

"Ten years ago," he answered, looking straight at her, letting her see that he was answering the full, unnamed meaning of her question.

"Where?" The word was almost a command.

He hesitated, then she saw a faint smile that touched only his lips, not his eyes, the kind of smile from which one contemplates—with longing, bitterness and pride—a possession purchased at an excruciating cost; his eyes seemed directed, not at her, but at the girl of that time. "Underground, in the Taggart Terminal," he answered.

She became suddenly conscious of her posture: she had let her shoulder blades slide down against the chair, carelessly, half-lying, one leg stretched forward—and with her sternly tailored, transparent blouse, her wide peasant skirt hand-printed in violent colors, her thin stocking and high-heeled pump, she did not look like a railroad executive—the consciousness of it struck her in answer to his eyes that seemed to be seeing the unattainable—she looked like that which she was: his servant girl. She knew the moment when some faintest stress of the brilliance in his dark green eyes removed the veil of distance, replacing the vision of the past by the act of seeing her immediate person. She met his eyes with that insolent glance which is a smile without movement of facial muscles.

He turned away, but as he moved across the room his steps were as eloquent as the sound of a voice. She knew that he wanted to leave the room, as he always left it, he had never stayed for longer than a brief good night when he came home. She watched the course of his struggle, whether by means of his steps, begun in one direction