

ebbing out and the plane being tamed to the safety of a car, as it taxied smoothly off the runway.

It was a small private airfield, serving the meager traffic of a few industrial concerns still remaining in Afton. She saw a lone attendant hurrying to meet her. She leaped down to the ground the moment the plane stood still, the hours of the flight swept from her mind by the impatience over the stretch of a few more minutes.

"Can I get a car somewhere to drive me to the Institute of Technology at once?" she asked.

The attendant looked at her, puzzled. "Why, yes, I guess so, ma'am. But . . . but what for? There's nobody there."

"Mr. Quentin Daniels is there."

The attendant shook his head slowly—then jerked his thumb, pointing east to the shrinking taillights of the plane. "There's Mr. Daniels going now."

"What?"

"He just left."

"Left? Why?"

"He went with the man who flew in for him two-three hours ago."

"What man?"

"Don't know, never saw him before, but, boy!—he's got a beauty of a ship!"

She was back at the wheel, she was speeding down the runway, she was rising into the air, her plane like a bullet aimed at two sparks of red and green light that were twinkling away into the eastern sky—while she was still repeating, "Oh no, they don't! They don't! They don't! They don't!"

Once and for all—she thought, clutching the wheel as if it were the enemy not to be relinquished, her words like separate explosions with a trail of fire in her mind to link them—once and for all . . . to meet the destroyer face to face . . . to learn who he is and where he goes to vanish . . . not the motor . . . he is not to carry the motor away into the darkness of his monstrously closed unknown . . . he is not to escape, this time. . .

A band of light was rising in the east and it seemed to come from the earth, as a breath long-held and released. In the deep blue above it, the stranger's plane was a single spark changing color and flashing from side to side, like the tip of a pendulum swinging in the darkness, beating time.

The curve of distance made the spark drop closer to the earth, and she pushed her throttle wide open, not to let the spark out of her sight, not to let it touch the horizon and vanish. The light was flowing into the sky, as if drawn from the earth by the stranger's plane. The plane was headed southeast, and she was following it into the coming sunrise.

From the transparent green of ice, the sky melted into pale gold, and the gold spread into a lake under a fragile film of pink glass, the color of that forgotten morning which was the first she had seen on earth. The clouds were dropping away in long shreds of smoky blue. She kept her eyes on the stranger's plane, as if her glance were a

towline pulling her ship. The stranger's plane was now a small black cross, like a shrinking check mark on the glowing sky.

Then she noticed that the clouds were not dropping, that they stood congealed on the edge of the earth—and she realized that the plane was headed toward the mountains of Colorado, that the struggle against the invisible storm lay ahead for her once more. She noted it without emotion: she did not wonder whether her ship or her body had the power to attempt it again. So long as she was able to move, she would move to follow the speck that was fleeing away with the last of her world. She felt nothing but the emptiness left by a fire that had been hatred and anger and the desperate impulse of a fight to the kill; these had fused into a single icy streak, the single resolve to follow the stranger, whoever he was, wherever he took her, to follow and . . . she added nothing in her mind, but, unstated, what lay at the bottom of the emptiness was: and give her life, if she could take his first.

Like an instrument set to automatic control, her body was performing the motions of driving the plane—with the mountains reeling in a bluish fog below and the dented peaks rising in her path as smoky formations of a deadlier blue. She noticed that the distance to the stranger's plane had shrunk: he had checked his speed for the dangerous crossing, while she had gone on, unconscious of the danger, with only the muscles of her arms and legs fighting to keep her plane aloft. A brief, tight movement of her lips was as close as she could come to a smile: it was he who was flying her plane for her, she thought; he had given her the power to follow him with a somnambulist's unerring skill.

As it responding of itself to his control, the needle of her altimeter was slowly moving upward. She was rising and she went on rising and she wondered when her breath and her propeller would fail. He was going southeast, toward the highest mountains that obstructed the path of the sun.

It was his plane that was struck by the first sunray. It flashed for an instant, like a burst of white fire, sending rays to shoot from its wings. The peaks of the mountains came next: she saw the sunlight reaching the snow in the crevices, then trickling down the granite sides; it cut violent shadows on the ledges and brought the mountains into the living finality of a form.

They were flying over the wildest stretch of Colorado, uninhabited, uninhabitable, inaccessible to men on foot or plane. No landing was possible within a radius of a hundred miles: she glanced at her fuel gauge: she had one half-hour left. The stranger was heading straight toward another, higher range. She wondered why he chose a course no air route did or ever would travel. She wished this range were behind her; it was the last effort she could hope to make.

The stranger's plane was suddenly slackening its speed. He was losing altitude just when she had expected him to climb. The granite barrier was rising in his path, moving to meet him, reaching for his wings, but the long, smooth line of his motion was sliding down. She could detect no break, no jolt, no sign of mechanical failure: it looked like the even movement of a controlled intention. With a sudden flash of sunlight on its wings, the plane banked into a long curve, rays dripping