

motor set to the automatic control of an absolute no longer to be questioned. If a naked bullet could feel in mid-flight, that is what it would feel, she thought; just the motion and the goal, nothing else. She thought it vaguely, distantly, as if her own person were unreal; only the word "naked" seemed to reach her; naked . . . stripped of all concern but for the target . . . for the number "367," the number of a house on the East River, which her mind kept repeating, the number it had so long been forbidden to consider.

Three-sixty-seven—she thought, looking for an invisible shape ahead, among the angular forms of tenements—three-sixty-seven . . . that is where he lives . . . if he lives at all. . . . Her calm, her detachment and the confidence of her steps came from the certainty that this was an "if" with which she could not exist any longer.

She had existed with it for ten days—and the nights behind her were a single progression that had brought her to this night, as if the momentum now driving her steps were the sound of her own steps still ringing, unanswered, in the tunnels of the Terminal. She had searched for him through the tunnels, she had walked for hours, night after night—the hours of the shift he had once worked—through the underground passages and platforms and shops and every twist of abandoned tracks, asking no questions of anyone, offering no explanations of her presence. She had walked, with no sense of fear or hope, moved by a feeling of desperate loyalty that was almost a feeling of pride. The root of that feeling was the moments when she had stopped in sudden astonishment in some dark subterranean corner and had heard the words half-stated in her mind. This is my railroad—as she looked at a vault vibrating to the sound of distant wheels; this is my life—as she felt the clot of tension, which was the stopped and the suspended within herself; this is my love—as the thought of the man who, perhaps, was somewhere in those tunnels. There can be no conflict among these three . . . what am I doubting? . . . what can keep us apart, *here*, where only he and I belong? . . . Then, recapturing the context of the present, she had walked steadily on, with the sense of the same unbroken loyalty, but the sound of different words: You have forbidden me to look for you, you may damn me, you may choose to discard me . . . but by the right of the fact that *I* am alive, I must know that *you* are . . . I must see you this once . . . not to stop, not to speak, not to touch you, only to see. . . . She had not seen him. She had abandoned her search, when she had noticed the curious, wondering glances of the underground workers, following her steps.

She had called a meeting of the Terminal track laborers for the alleged purpose of boosting their morale, she had held the meeting twice, to face all the men in turn—she had repeated the same unintelligible speech, feeling a stab of shame at the empty generalities she uttered and, together, a stab of pride that it did not matter to her any longer—she had looked at the exhausted, brutalized faces of men who did not care whether they were ordered to work or to listen to meaningless sounds. She had not seen his face among them. "Was everyone present?" she had asked the foreman. "Yeah, I guess so," he had answered indifferently.

She had loitered at the Terminal entrances, watching the men as they came to work. But there were too many entrances to cover and no place where she could watch while remaining unseen—she had stood in the soggy twilight on a sidewalk glittering with rain, pressed to the wall of a warehouse, her coat collar raised to her cheekbones, raindrops falling off the brim of her hat—she had stood exposed to the sight of the street, knowing that the glances of the men who passed her were glances of recognition and astonishment, knowing that her vigil was too dangerously obvious. If there was a John Galt among them, someone could guess the nature of her quest . . . if there was no John Galt among them . . . if there was no John Galt in the world, she thought, then no danger existed—and no world.

No danger and no world, she thought—as she walked through the streets of the slums toward a house with the number “367,” which was or was not his home. She wondered whether this was what one felt while awaiting a verdict of death: no fear, no anger, no concern, nothing but the icy detachment of light without heat or of cognition without values.

A tin can clattered from under her toes, and the sound went beating too loudly and too long, as if against the walls of an abandoned city. The streets seemed razed by exhaustion, not by rest, as if the men inside the walls were not asleep, but had collapsed. He would be home from work at this hour, she thought . . . if he worked . . . if he still had a home. . . . She looked at the shapes of the slums, at the crumbling plaster, the peeling paint, the fading signboards of failing shops with unwanted goods in unwashed windows, the sagging steps unsafe to climb, the clotheslines of garments unfit to wear, the undone, the unattended, the given up, the incomplete, all the twisted monuments of a losing race against two enemies: “no time” and “no strength”—and she thought that this was the place where *he* had lived for twelve years, he who possessed such extravagant power to lighten the job of human existence.

Some memory kept struggling to reach her, then came back: its name was Starnesville. She felt the sensation of a shudder. But this is New York City!—she cried to herself in defense of the greatness she had loved; then she faced with unmoving austerity the verdict pronounced by her mind: a city that had left him in these slums for twelve years was damned and doomed to the future of Starnesville.

Then, abruptly, it ceased to matter; she felt a peculiar shock, like the shock of sudden silence, a sense of stillness within her, which she took for a sense of calm: she saw the number “367” above the door of an ancient tenement.

She was calm, she thought, it was only time that had suddenly lost its continuity and had broken her perception into separate snatches. She knew the moment when she saw the number—then the moment when she looked at a list on a board in the moldy halflight of a doorway and saw the words “John Galt, 5th rear” scrawled in pencil by some illiterate hand—then the moment when she stopped at the foot of a stairway, glanced up at the vanishing angles of the railing and suddenly leaned against the wall, trembling with terror, preferring not to know—then the moment when she felt the movement of