

AYN RAND ATLAS SHRUGGED

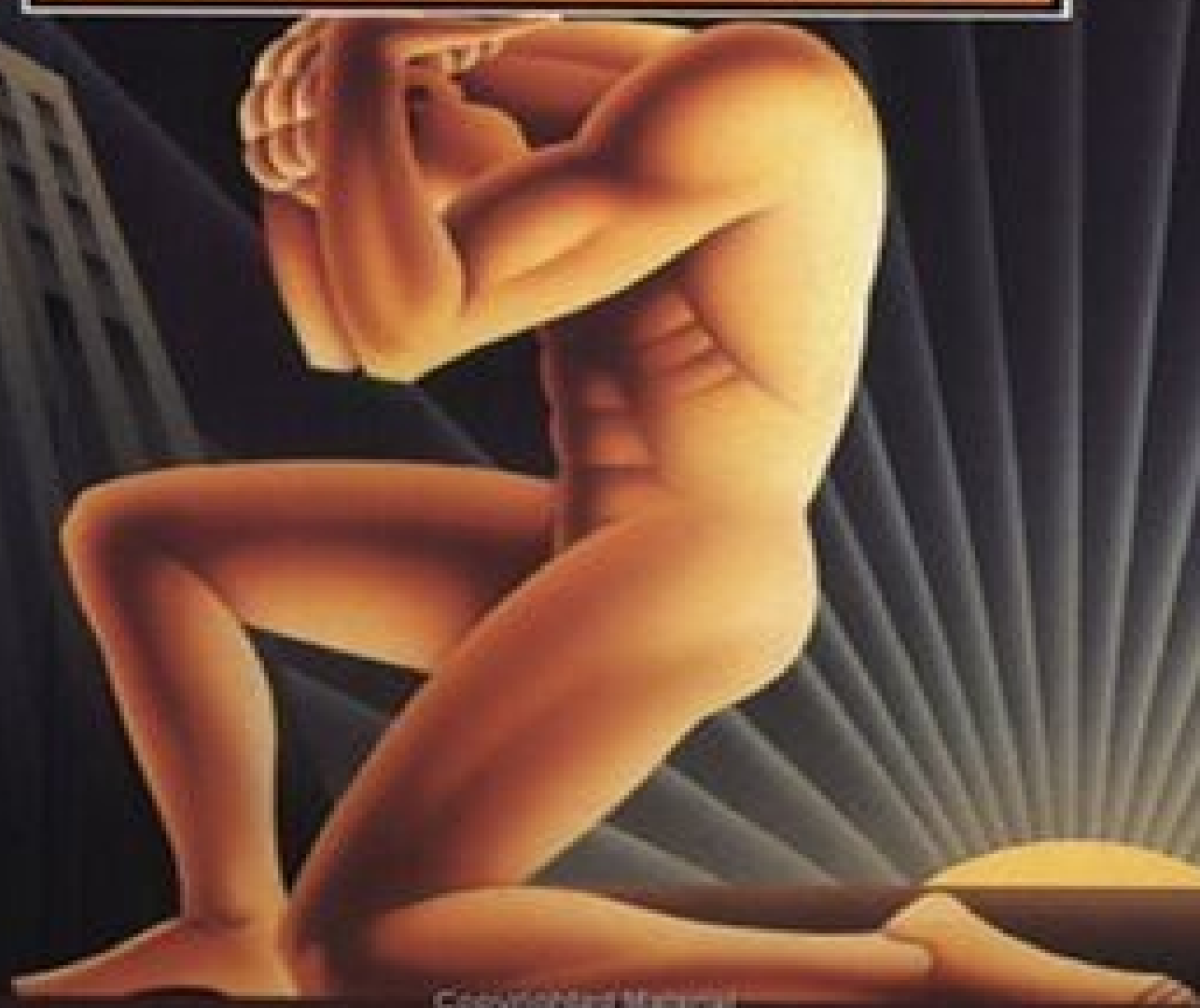


Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Introduction](#)

[PART I - NON-CONTRADICTION](#)

[CHAPTER I - THE THEME](#)

[CHAPTER II - THE CHAIN](#)

[CHAPTER III - THE TOP AND THE BOTTOM](#)

[CHAPTER IV - THE IMMOVABLE MOVERS](#)

[CHAPTER V - THE CLIMAX OF THE D'ANCONIAS](#)

[CHAPTER VI - THE NON-COMMERCIAL](#)

[CHAPTER VII - THE EXPLOITERS AND THE EXPLOITED](#)

[CHAPTER VIII - THE JOHN GALT LINE](#)

[CHAPTER IX - THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE](#)

[CHAPTER X - WYATT'S TORCH](#)

[PART II - EITHER-OR](#)

[CHAPTER I - THE MAN WHO BELONGED ON EARTH](#)

[CHAPTER II - THE ARISTOCRACY OF PULL](#)

[CHAPTER III - WHITE BLACKMAIL](#)

[CHAPTER IV - THE SANCTION OF THE VICTIM](#)

[CHAPTER V - ACCOUNT OVERDRAWN](#)

[CHAPTER VI - MIRACLE METAL](#)

[CHAPTER VII - THE MORATORIUM ON BRAINS](#)

[CHAPTER VIII - BY OUR LOVE](#)

[CHAPTER IX - THE FACE WITHOUT PAIN OR FEAR OR GUILT](#)

[CHAPTER X - THE SIGN OF THE DOLLAR](#)

[PART III - A IS A](#)

CHAPTER I - ATLANTIS

CHAPTER II - THE UTOPIA OF GREED

CHAPTER III - ANTI-GREED

CHAPTER IV - ANTI-LIFE

CHAPTER V - THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS

CHAPTER VI - THE CONCERTO OF DELIVERANCE

CHAPTER VII - "THIS IS JOHN GALT SPEAKING"

CHAPTER VIII - THE EGOIST

CHAPTER IX - THE GENERATOR

CHAPTER X - IN THE NAME OF THE BEST WITHIN US

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

We the Living
Anthem
The Fountainhead
Atlas Shrugged
For the New Intellectual
The Virtue of Selfishness
Capitalism: the Unknown Ideal
The New Left: the Anti-Industrial Revolution
The Romantic Manifesto
Night of January 16th
Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology
Philosophy: Who Needs It.

ATLAS
SHRUGGED

AYN RAND



DUTTON

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TO FRANK O'CONNOR

INTRODUCTION TO THE 35th ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Ayn Rand held that art is a “re-creation of reality according to an artist’s metaphysical value-judgments.” By its nature, therefore, a novel (like a statue or a symphony) does not require or tolerate an explanatory preface; it is a self-contained universe, aloof from commentary, beckoning the reader to enter, perceive, respond.

Ayn Rand would never have approved of a didactic (or laudatory) introduction to her book, and I have no intention of flouting her wishes. Instead, I am going to give her the floor. I am going to let you in on some of the thinking she did as she was preparing to write *Atlas Shrugged*.

Before starting a novel, Ayn Rand wrote voluminously in her journals about its theme, plot, and characters. She wrote not for any audience, but strictly for herself—that is, for the clarity of her own understanding. The journals dealing with *Atlas Shrugged* are powerful examples of her mind in action, confident even when groping, purposeful even when stymied, luminously eloquent even though wholly unedited. These journals are also a fascinating record of the step-by-step birth of an immortal work of art.

In due course, all of Ayn Rand’s writings will be published. For this 35th anniversary edition of *Atlas Shrugged*, however, I have selected, as a kind of advance bonus for her fans, four typical journal entries. Let me warn new readers that the passages reveal the plot and will spoil the book for anyone who reads them before knowing the story.

As I recall, “Atlas Shrugged” did not become the novel’s title until Miss Rand’s husband made the suggestion in 1956. The working title throughout the writing was “The Strike.”

The earliest of Miss Rand’s notes for “The Strike” are dated January 1, 1945, about a year after the publication of *The Fountainhead*. Naturally enough, the subject on her mind was how to differentiate the present novel from its predecessor.

Theme: What happens to the world when the Prime Movers go on strike.

This means—a picture of the world with its motor cut off. Show: what, how, why. The specific steps and incidents—in terms of persons, their spirits, motives, psychology and actions—and, secondarily proceeding from persons, in

terms of history, society and the world.

The theme requires: to show who are the prime movers and why, how they function. Who are their enemies and why, what are the motives behind the hatred for and the enslavement of the prime movers; the nature of the obstacles placed in their way, and the reasons for it.

This last paragraph is contained entirely in *The Fountainhead*. Roark and Toohey are the complete statement of it. Therefore, this is not the direct theme of *The Strike*—but it is part of the theme and must be kept in mind, stated again (though briefly) to have the theme clear and complete.

First question to decide is on whom the emphasis must be placed—on the prime movers, the parasites or the world. The answer is: The world. The story must be primarily a picture of the whole.

In this sense, *The Strike* is to be much more a “social” novel than *The Fountainhead*. *The Fountainhead* was about “individualism and collectivism within man’s soul”; it showed the nature and function of the creator and the second-hander. The primary concern there was with Roark and Toohey—showing what they are. The rest of the characters were variations of the theme of the relation of the ego to others—mixtures of the two extremes, the two poles: Roark and Toohey. The primary concern of the story was the characters, the people as such—their natures. Their relations to each other—which is society, men in relation to men—were secondary, an unavoidable, direct consequence of Roark set against Toohey. But it was not the theme.

Now, it is this relation that must be the theme. Therefore, the personal becomes secondary. That is, the personal is necessary only to the extent needed to make the relationships clear. In *The Fountainhead* I showed that Roark moves the world—that the Keatings feed upon him and hate him for it, while the Tooheys are out consciously to destroy him. But the theme was Roark—not Roark’s relation to the world. Now it will be the relation.

In other words, I must show in what concrete, specific way the world is moved by the creators. Exactly how do the second-handers live on the creators. Both in *spiritual* matters—and (most particularly) in concrete physical events. (Concentrate on the concrete, physical events—but don’t forget to keep in mind at all times how the physical proceeds from the spiritual.) ...

However, for the purpose of this story, I do not start by showing how the second-handers live on the prime movers in actual, everyday reality—nor do I start by showing a normal world. (That comes in only in necessary retrospect, or flashback, or by implication in the events themselves.) I start with the fantastic

premise of the prime movers going on strike. This is the actual heart and center of the novel. A distinction carefully to be observed here: I do not set out to glorify the prime mover (that was *The Fountainhead*). I set out to show how desperately the world needs prime movers, and how viciously it treats them. And I show it on a hypothetical case—what happens to the world without them.

In *The Fountainhead* I did not show how desperately the world needed Roark—except by implication. I did show how viciously the world treated him, and why. I showed mainly what he is. It was Roark's story. This must be the world's story—in relation to its prime movers. (Almost—the story of a body in relation to its heart—a body dying of anemia.)

I don't show directly what the prime movers do—that's shown only by implication. I show what happens when they don't do it. (Through that, you see the picture of what they do, their place and their role.) (This is an important guide for the construction of the story.)

In order to work out the story, Ayn Rand had to understand fully why the prime movers *allowed* the second handers to live on them—why the creators had not gone on strike throughout history—what errors even the best of them made that kept them in thrall to the worst. Part of the answer is dramatized in the character of Dagny Taggart, the railroad heiress who declares war on the strikers. Here is a note on her psychology, dated April 18, 1946:

Her error—and the cause of her refusal to join the strike—is over-optimism and over-confidence (particularly this last).

Over-optimism—in that she thinks men are better than they are, she doesn't really understand them and is generous about it.

Over-confidence—in that she thinks she can do more than an individual actually can. She thinks she can run a railroad (or the world) single-handed, she can make people do what she wants or needs, what is right, by the sheer force of her own talent; not by forcing them, of course, not by enslaving them and giving orders—but by the sheer over-abundance of her own energy; she will show them how, she can teach them and persuade them, she is so able that they'll catch it from her. (This is still faith in their rationality, in the omnipotence of reason. The mistake? Reason is not automatic. Those who deny it cannot be conquered by it. Do not count on them. Leave them alone.)

On these two points, Dagny is committing an important (but excusable and understandable) error in thinking, the kind of error individualists and creators

often make. It is an error proceeding from the best in their nature and from a proper principle, but this principle is misapplied. . . .

The error is this: it is proper for a creator to be optimistic, in the deepest, most basic sense, since the creator believes in a benevolent universe and functions on that premise. But it is an error to extend that optimism to other *specific* men. First, it's not necessary, the creator's life and the nature of the universe do not require it, his life does not depend on others. Second, man is a being with free will; therefore, each man is potentially good or evil, and it's up to him and only to him (through his reasoning mind) to decide which he wants to be. The decision will affect only him; it is not (and cannot and should not be) the primary concern of any other human being.

Therefore, while a creator does and must worship Man (which means his own highest potentiality; which is his natural self-reverence), he must not make the mistake of thinking that this means the necessity to worship Mankind (as a collective). These are two entirely different conceptions, with entirety—(immensely and diametrically opposed)—different consequences.

Man, at his highest potentiality, is realized and fulfilled within each creator himself.... Whether the creator is alone, or finds only a handful of others like him, or is among the majority of mankind, is of no importance or consequence whatever; numbers have nothing to do with it. He alone or he and a few others like him are mankind, in the proper sense of being the proof of what man actually is, man at his best, the essential man, man at his highest possibility. (The rational being, who acts according to his nature.)

It should not matter to a creator whether anyone or a million or *all* the men around him fall short of the ideal of Man; let him live up to that ideal himself; this is all the “optimism” about Man that he needs. But this is a hard and subtle thing to realize—and it would be natural for Dagny always to make the mistake of believing others are better than they really are (or will become better, or she will teach them to become better or, actually, she so desperately wants them to be better)-and to be tied to the world by that hope.

It is proper for a creator to have an unlimited confidence in himself and his ability, to feel certain that he can get anything he wishes out of life, that he can accomplish anything he decides to accomplish, and that it's up to him to do it. (He feels it because he is a man of reason ...) [But] here is what he must keep clearly in mind: it is true that a creator can accomplish anything he wishes—if he functions according to the nature of man, the universe and his own proper morality, that is, if he does not place his wish primarily within others and does

not attempt or desire anything that is of a collective nature, anything that concerns others primarily or requires primarily the exercise of the will of others. (This would be an immoral desire or attempt, contrary to his nature as a creator.) If he attempts that, he is out of a creator's province and in that of the collectivist and the second-hander.

Therefore, he must never feel confident that he can do anything whatever to, by or through others. (He can't—and he shouldn't even wish to try it—and the mere attempt is improper.) He must not think that he can ... somehow transfer his energy and his intelligence to them and make them fit for his purposes in that way. He must face other men as they are, recognizing them as essentially independent entities, by nature, and beyond his primary influence; [he must] deal with them only on his own, independent terms, deal with such as he judges can fit his purpose or live up to his standards (by themselves and of their own will, independently of him)—and expect nothing from the others....

Now, in Dagny's case, her desperate desire is to run Taggart Transcontinental. She sees that there are no men suited to her purpose around her, no men of ability, independence and competence. She thinks she can run it with others, with the incompetent and the parasites, either by training them or merely by treating them as robots who will take her orders and function without personal initiative or responsibility; *with herself*, in effect, being the spark *of* initiative, the bearer *of* responsibility for a whole collective. This can't be done. This is her crucial error. This is where she fails.

Ayn Rand's basic purpose as a novelist was to present not villains or even heroes with errors, but the ideal man—the consistent, the fully integrated, the perfect. In *Atlas Shrugged*, this is John Galt, the towering figure who moves the world and the novel, yet does not appear onstage until Part III. By his nature (and that of the story) Galt is necessarily central to the lives of all the characters. In one note, "Galt's relation to the others," dated June 27, 1946, Miss Rand defines succinctly what Galt represents to each of them:

For *Dagny*—the ideal. The answer to her two quests: the man of genius and the man she loves. The first quest is expressed in her search for the inventor of the engine. The second—her growing conviction that she will never be in love ...

For Rearden—the friend. The kind of understanding and appreciation he has always wanted and did not know he wanted (or he thought he had it—he tried to

find it in those around him, to get it from his wife, his mother, brother and sister).

For *Francisco d'Anconia*—the aristocrat. The only man who represents a challenge and a stimulant—almost the “proper kind” of audience, worthy of stunning for the sheer joy and color of life.

For *Danneskjöld*—the anchor. The only man who represents land and roots to a restless, reckless wanderer, like the goal of a struggle, the port at the end of a fierce sea-voyage—the only man he can respect.

For the *Composer*—the inspiration and the perfect audience.

For the *Philosopher*—the embodiment of his abstractions.

For Father *Amadeus*—the source of his conflict. The uneasy realization that Galt is the end of his endeavors, the man of virtue, the perfect man—and that his means do not fit this end (and that he is destroying this, his ideal, for the sake of those who are evil).

To James *Taggart*—the eternal threat. The secret dread. The reproach. The guilt (his own guilt). He has no specific tie-in with Galt—but he has that constant, causeless, unnamed, hysterical fear. And he recognizes it when he hears Galt's broadcast and when he sees Galt in person for the first time.

To the Professor—his conscience. The reproach and reminder. The ghost that haunts him through everything he does, without a moment's peace. The thing that says: “No” to his whole life.

Some notes on the above: Rearden's sister, Stacy, was a minor character later cut from the novel.

“Francisco” was spelled “Francesco” in these early years, while Danneskjöld's first name at this point was Ivar, presumably after Ivar Kreuger, the Swedish “match king,” who was the real-life model of Bjorn Faulkner in *Night of January 16th*.

Father Amadeus was Taggart's priest, to whom he confessed his sins. The priest was supposed to be a positive character, honestly devoted to the good but practicing consistently the morality of mercy. Miss Rand dropped him, she told me, when she found that it was impossible to make such a character convincing.

The Professor is Robert Stadler.

This brings me to a final excerpt. Because of her passion for ideas, Miss Rand was often asked whether she was primarily a philosopher or a novelist. In later years, she was impatient with this question, but she gave her own answer, to and for herself, in a note dated May 4, 1946. The broader context was a discussion of

the nature of creativity.

I seem to be both a theoretical philosopher and a fiction writer. But it is the last that interests me most; the first is only the means to the last; the absolutely necessary means, but only the means; the fiction story is the end. Without an understanding and statement of the right philosophical principle, I cannot create the right story; but the discovery of the principle interests me only as the discovery of the proper knowledge to be used for my life purpose; and my life purpose is the creation of the kind of world (people and events) that I like—that is, that represents human perfection.

Philosophical knowledge is necessary in order to define human perfection. But I do not care to stop at the definition. I want to use it, to apply it—in my work; (in my personal life, too—but the core, center and purpose of my personal life, of my whole life, is my work).

This is why, I think, the idea of writing a philosophical non-fiction book bored me. In such a book, the purpose would actually be to teach others, to present my idea to them. In a book of fiction the purpose is to create, for myself, the kind of world I want and to live in it while I am creating it; then, as a secondary consequence, to let others enjoy this world, if, and to the extent that, they can.

It may be said that the first purpose of a philosophical book is the clarification or statement of your new knowledge to and for yourself; and then, as a secondary step, the offering of your knowledge to others. But here is the difference, as far as I am concerned: I have to acquire and state to myself the new philosophical knowledge or principle I used in order to write a fiction story as its embodiment and illustration; I do not care to write a story on a theme or thesis of old knowledge, knowledge stated or discovered by someone else, that is, someone else's philosophy (because those philosophies are wrong). To this extent, I am an abstract philosopher (I want to present the perfect man and his perfect life—and I must also discover my own philosophical statement and definition of this perfection).

But when and if I have discovered such new knowledge, I am not interested in stating it in its abstract, general form, that is, as knowledge. I am interested in using it, in applying it—that is, in stating it in the concrete form of men and events, in the form of a fiction story. This last is my final purpose, my end; the philosophical knowledge or discovery is only the means to it. For my purpose, the non-fiction form of abstract knowledge doesn't interest me; the final, applied form of fiction, of story, does. (I state the knowledge to myself, anyway; but I choose the final form of it, the expression, in the completed cycle that leads back

to man.)

I wonder to what extent I represent a peculiar phenomenon in this respect. I think I represent the proper integration of a complete human being. Anyway, this should be my lead for the character of John Galt. He, too, is a combination of an abstract philosopher and a practical inventor; the thinker and the man of action together ...

In learning, we draw an abstraction from concrete objects and events. In creating, we make our own concrete objects and events out of the abstraction; we bring the abstraction down and back to its specific meaning, to the concrete; but the abstraction has helped us to make the kind *of* concrete we want the concrete to be. It has helped us to create—to re-shape the world as we wish it to be for our purposes.

I cannot resist quoting one further paragraph. It comes a few pages later in the same discussion.

Incidentally, as a sideline observation: if creative fiction writing is a process of translating an abstraction into the concrete, there are three possible grades of such writing: translating an old (known) abstraction (theme or thesis) through the medium of old fiction means, (that is, characters, events or situations used before for that same purpose, that same translation)—this is most of the popular trash; translating an old abstraction through new, original fiction means—this is most of the good literature; creating a new, original abstraction and translating it through new, original means. This, as far as I know, is only me—my kind of fiction writing. May God forgive me (Metaphor!) if this is mistaken conceit! As near as I can now see it, it isn't. (A fourth possibility—translating a new abstraction through old means—is impossible, by definition: if the abstraction is new, there can be no means used by anybody else before to translate it.)

Is her conclusion “mistaken conceit”? It is now forty-five years since she wrote this note, and you are holding Ayn Rand's masterwork in your hands.

You decide.

-Leonard Peikoff
September 1991

PART I

NON-CONTRADICTION

CHAPTER V

THE CLIMAX OF THE D'ANCONIAS

The newspaper was the first thing she noticed. It was clutched tightly in Eddie's hand, as he entered her office. She glanced up at his face: it was tense and bewildered.

"Dagny, are you very busy?"

"Why?"

"I know that you don't like to talk about him. But there's something here I think you ought to see."

She extended her hand silently for the newspaper.

The story on the front page announced that upon taking over the San Sebastián Mines, the government of the People's State of Mexico had discovered that they were worthless—blatantly, totally, hopelessly worthless. There was nothing to justify the five years of work and the millions spent; nothing but empty excavations, laboriously cut. The few traces of copper were not worth the effort of extracting them. No great deposits of metal existed or could be expected to exist there, and there were no indications that could have permitted anyone to be deluded. The government of the People's State of Mexico was holding emergency sessions about their discovery, in an uproar of indignation; they felt that they had been cheated.

Watching her, Eddie knew that Dagny sat looking at the newspaper long after she had finished reading. He knew that he had been right to feel a hint of fear, even though he could not tell what frightened him about that story.

He waited. She raised her head. She did not look at him. Her eyes were fixed, intent in concentration, as if trying to discern something at a great distance.

He said, his voice low, "Francisco is not a fool. Whatever else he may be, no matter what depravity he's sunk to—and I've given up trying to figure out why—he is not a fool. He couldn't have made a mistake of this kind. It is not possible. I don't understand it."

"I'm beginning to."

She sat up, jolted upright by a sudden movement that ran through her body like a shudder. She said:

“Phone him at the Wayne-Falkland and tell the bastard that I want to see him.”

“Dagny,” he said sadly, reproachfully, “it’s Frisco d’Anconia.”

“It was.”



She walked through the early twilight of the city streets to the Wayne-Falkland Hotel. “He says, any time you wish,” Eddie had told her. The first lights appeared in a few windows high under the clouds. The skyscrapers looked like abandoned lighthouses sending feeble, dying signals out into an empty sea where no ships moved any longer. A few snowflakes came down, past the dark windows of empty stores, to melt in the mud of the sidewalks. A string of red lanterns cut the street, going off into the murky distance.

She wondered why she felt that she wanted to run, that she should be running; no, not down this street; down a green hillside in the blazing sun to the road on the edge of the Hudson, at the foot of the Taggart estate. That was the way she always ran when Eddie yelled, “It’s Frisco d’Anconia!” and they both flew down the hill to the car approaching on the road below.

He was the only guest whose arrival was an event in their childhood, their biggest event. The running to meet him had become part of a contest among the three of them. There was a birch tree on the hillside, halfway between the road and the house; Dagny and Eddie tried to get past the tree, before Francisco could race up the hill to meet them. On all the many days of his arrivals, in all the many summers, they never reached the birch tree; Francisco reached it first and stopped them when he was way past it. Francisco always won, as he always won everything.

His parents were old friends of the Taggart family. He was an only son and he was being brought up all over the world; his father, it was said, wanted him to consider the world as his future domain. Dagny and Eddie could never be certain of where he would spend his winter; but once a year, every summer, a stern South American tutor brought him for a month to the Taggart estate.

Francisco found it natural that the Taggart children should be chosen as his companions: they were the crown heirs of Taggart Transcontinental, as he was of d’Anconia Copper. “We are the only aristocracy left in the world—the aristocracy of money,” he said to Dagny once, when he was fourteen. “It’s the

only real aristocracy, if people understood what it means, which they don't."

He had a caste system of his own: to him, the Taggart children were not Jim and Dagny, but Dagny and Eddie. He seldom volunteered to notice Jim's existence. Eddie asked him once, "Francisco, you're some kind of very high nobility, aren't you?" He answered, "Not yet. The reason my family has lasted for such a long time is that none of us has ever been permitted to think he is born a d'Anconia. We are expected to become one." He pronounced his name as if he wished his listeners to be struck in the face and knighted by the sound of it.

Sebastian d'Anconia, his ancestor, had left Spain many centuries ago, at a time when Spain was the most powerful country on earth and his was one of Spain's proudest figures. He left, because the lord of the Inquisition did not approve of his manner of thinking and suggested, at a court banquet, that he change it. Sebastián d'Anconia threw the contents of his wine glass at the face of the lord of the Inquisition, and escaped before he could be seized. He left behind him his fortune, his estate, his marble palace and the girl he loved—and he sailed to a new world.

His first estate in Argentina was a wooden shack in the foothills of the Andes. The sun blazed like a beacon on the silver coat-of-arms of the d'Anconias, nailed over the door of the shack, while Sebastián d'Anconia dug for the copper of his first mine. He spent years, pickax in hand, breaking rock from sunrise till darkness, with the help of a few stray derelicts: deserters from the armies of his countrymen, escaped convicts, starving Indians.

Fifteen years after he left Spain, Sebastián d'Anconia sent for the girl he loved; she had waited for him. When she arrived, she found the silver coat-of-arms above the entrance of a marble palace, the gardens of a great estate, and mountains slashed by pits of red ore in the distance. He carried her in his arms across the threshold of his home. He looked younger than when she had seen him last.

"My ancestor and yours," Francisco told Dagny, "would have liked each other."

Through the years of her childhood, Dagny lived in the future—in the world she expected to find, where she would not have to feel contempt or boredom. But for one month each year, she was free. For one month, she could live in the present. When she raced down the hill to meet Francisco d'Anconia, it was a release from prison.

"Hi, Slug!"

"Hi, Frisco!"

They had both resented the nicknames, at first. She had asked him angrily, "What do you think you mean?" He had answered, "In case you don't know it, 'Slug' means a great fire in a locomotive firebox." "Where did you pick that up?" "From the gentlemen along the Taggart iron." He spoke five languages, and he spoke English without a trace of accent, a precise, cultured English deliberately mixed with slang. She had retaliated by calling him Frisco. He had laughed, amused and annoyed. "If you barbarians had to degrade the name of a great city of yours, you could at least refrain from doing it to me." But they had grown to like the nicknames.

It had started in the days of their second summer together, when he was twelve years old and she was ten. That summer, Francisco began vanishing every morning for some purpose nobody could discover. He went off on his bicycle before dawn, and returned in time to appear at the white and crystal table set for lunch on the terrace, his manner courteously punctual and a little too innocent. He laughed, refusing to answer, when Dagny and Eddie questioned him. They tried to follow him once, through the cold, pre-morning darkness, but they gave it up; no one could track him when he did not want to be tracked.

After a while, Mrs. Taggart began to worry and decided to investigate. She never learned how he had managed to by-pass all the child-labor laws, but she found Francisco working—by an unofficial deal with the dispatcher—as a call boy for Taggart Transcontinental, at a division point ten miles away. The dispatcher was stupefied by her personal visit; he had no idea that his call boy was a house guest of the Taggarts. The boy was known to the local railroad crews as Frankie, and Mrs. Taggart preferred not to enlighten them about his full name. She merely explained that he was working without his parents' permission and had to quit at once. The dispatcher was sorry to lose him; Frankie, he said, was the best call boy they had ever had. "I'd sure like to keep him on. Maybe we could make a deal with his parents?" he suggested. "I'm afraid not," said Mrs. Taggart faintly.

"Francisco," she asked, when she brought him home, "what would your father say about this, if he knew?"

"My father would ask whether I was good at the job or not. That's all he'd want to know."

"Come now, I'm serious."

Francisco was looking at her politely, his courteous manner suggesting centuries of breeding and drawing rooms; but something in his eyes made her feel uncertain about the politeness. "Last winter," he answered, "I shipped out as

cabin boy on a cargo steamer that carried d'Anconia copper. My father looked for me for three months, but that's all he asked me when I came back."

"So that's how you spend your winters?" said Jim Taggart. Jim's smile had a touch of triumph, the triumph of finding cause to feel contempt.

"That was last winter," Francisco answered pleasantly, with no change in the innocent, casual tone of his voice. "The winter before last I spent in Madrid, at the home of the Duke of Alba."

"Why did you want to work on a railroad?" asked Dagny.

They stood looking at each other: hers was a glance of admiration, his of mockery; but it was not the mockery of malice—it was the laughter of a salute.

"To learn what it's like, Slug," he answered, "and to tell you that I've had a job with Taggart Transcontinental before you did."

Dagny and Eddie spent their winters trying to master some new skill, in order to astonish Francisco and beat him, for once. They never succeeded. When they showed him how to hit a ball with a bat, a game he had never played before, he watched them for a few minutes, then said, "I think I get the idea. Let me try." He took the bat and sent the ball flying over a line of oak trees far at the end of the field.

When Jim was given a motorboat for his birthday, they all stood on the river landing, watching the lesson, while an instructor showed Jim how to run it. None of them had ever driven a motorboat before. The sparkling white craft, shaped like a bullet, kept staggering clumsily across the water, its wake a long record of shivering, its motor choking with hiccoughs, while the instructor, seated beside him, kept seizing the wheel out of Jim's hands. For no apparent reason, Jim raised his head suddenly and yelled at Francisco, "Do you think you can do it any better?" "I can do it." "Try it!"

When the boat came back and its two occupants stepped out, Francisco slipped behind the wheel. "Wait a moment," he said to the instructor, who remained on the landing. "Let me take a look at this." Then, before the instructor had time to move, the boat shot out to the middle of the river, as if fired from a gun. It was streaking away before they grasped what they were seeing. As it went shrinking into the distance and sunlight, Dagny's picture of it was three straight lines: its wake, the long shriek of its motor, and the aim of the driver at its wheel.

She noticed the strange expression of her father's face as he looked at the vanishing speedboat. He said nothing; he just stood looking. She remembered that she had seen him look that way once before. It was when he inspected a

complex system of pulleys which Francisco, aged twelve, had erected to make an elevator to the top of a rock; he was teaching Dagny and Eddie to dive from the rock into the Hudson. Francisco's notes of calculation were still scattered about on the ground; her father picked them up, looked at them, then asked, "Francisco, how many years of algebra have you had?" "Two years." "Who taught you to do this?" "Oh, that's just something I figured out." She did not know that what her father held on the crumpled sheets of paper was the crude version of a differential equation.

The heirs of Sebastián d'Anconia had been an unbroken line of first sons, who knew how to bear his name. It was a tradition of the family that the man to disgrace them would be the heir who died, leaving the d'Anconia fortune no greater than he had received it. Throughout the generations, that disgrace had not come. An Argentinian legend said that the hand of a d'Anconia had the miraculous power of the saints—only it was not the power to heal, but the power to produce.

The d'Anconia heirs had been men of unusual ability, but none of them could match what Francisco d'Anconia promised to become. It was as if the centuries had sifted the family's qualities through a fine mesh, had discarded the irrelevant, the inconsequential, the weak, and had let nothing through except pure talent; as if chance, for once, had achieved an entity devoid of the accidental.

Francisco could do anything he undertook, he could do it better than anyone else, and he did it without effort. There was no boasting in his manner and consciousness, no thought of comparison. His attitude was not: "I can do it better than you," but simply: "I can do it." What he meant by doing was doing superlatively.

No matter what discipline was required of him by his father's exacting plan for his education, no matter what subject he was ordered to study, Francisco mastered it with effortless amusement. His father adored him, but concealed it carefully, as he concealed the pride of knowing that he was bringing up the most brilliant phenomenon of a brilliant family line. Francisco, it was said, was to be the climax of the d'Anconias.

"I don't know what sort of motto the d'Anconias have on their family crest," Mrs. Taggart said once, "but I'm sure that Francisco will change it to 'What for?' " It was the first question he asked about any activity proposed to him—and nothing would make him act, if he found no valid answer. He flew through the days of his summer month like a rocket, but if one stopped him in mid-flight,

he could always name the purpose of his every random moment. Two things were impossible to him: to stand still or to move aimlessly.

“Let’s find out” was the motive he gave to Dagny and Eddie for anything he undertook, or “Let’s make it.” These were his only forms of enjoyment.

“I can do it,” he said, when he was building his elevator, clinging to the side of a cliff, driving metal wedges into rock, his arms moving with an expert’s rhythm, drops of blood slipping, unnoticed, from under a bandage on his wrist. “No, we can’t take turns, Eddie, you’re not big enough yet to handle a hammer. Just cart the weeds off and keep the way clear for me, I’ll do the rest.... What blood? Oh, that’s nothing, just a cut I got yesterday. Dagny, run to the house and bring me a clean bandage.”

Jim watched them. They left him alone, but they often saw him standing in the distance, watching Francisco with a peculiar kind of intensity.

He seldom spoke in Francisco’s presence. But he would corner Dagny and he would smile derisively, saying, “All those airs you put on, pretending that you’re an iron woman with a mind of her own! You’re a spineless dishrag, that’s all you are. It’s disgusting, the way you let that conceited punk order you about. He can twist you around his little finger. You haven’t any pride at all. The way you run when he whistles and wait on him! Why don’t you shine his shoes?” “Because he hasn’t told me to,” she answered.

Francisco could win any game in any local contest. He never entered contests. He could have ruled the junior country club. He never came within sight of their clubhouse, ignoring their eager attempts to enroll the most famous heir in the world. Dagny and Eddie were his only friends. They could not tell whether they owned him or were owned by him completely; it made no difference: either concept made them happy.

The three of them set out every morning on adventures of their own kind. Once, an elderly professor of literature, Mrs. Taggart’s friend, saw them on top of a pile in a junk yard, dismantling the carcass of an automobile. He stopped, shook his head and said to Francisco, “A young man of your position ought to spend his time in libraries, absorbing the culture of the world.” “What do you think I’m doing?” asked Francisco.

There were no factories in the neighborhood, but Francisco taught Dagny and Eddie to steal rides on Taggart trains to distant towns, where they climbed fences into mill yards or hung on window sills, watching machinery as other children watched movies. “When I run Taggart Transcontinental ...” Dagny would say at times. “When I run d’Anconia Copper ...” said Francisco. They never had to

explain the rest to each other; they knew each other's goal and motive.

Railroad conductors caught them, once in a while. Then a stationmaster a hundred miles away would telephone Mrs. Taggart: "We've got three young tramps here who say that they are—" "Yes," Mrs. Taggart would sigh, "they are. Please send them back."

"Francisco," Eddie asked him once, as they stood by the tracks of the Taggart station, "you've been just about everywhere in the world. What's the most important thing on earth?" "This," answered Francisco, pointing to the emblem TT on the front of an engine. He added, "I wish I could have met Nat Taggart."

He noticed Dagny's glance at him. He said nothing else. But minutes later, when they went on through the woods, down a narrow path of damp earth, ferns and sunlight, he said, "Dagny, I'll always bow to a coat-of-arms. I'll always worship the symbols of nobility. Am I not supposed to be an aristocrat? Only I don't give a damn for moth-eaten turrets and tenth-hand unicorns. The coats-of-arms of our day are to be found on billboards and in the ads of popular magazines." "What do you mean?" asked Eddie. "Industrial trademarks, Eddie," he answered. Francisco was fifteen years old, that summer.

"When I run d'Anconia Copper ..." "I'm studying mining and mineralogy, because I must be ready for the time when I run d'Anconia Copper...." "I'm studying electrical engineering, because power companies are the best customers of d'Anconia Copper...." "I'm going to study philosophy, because I'll need it to protect d'Anconia Copper...."

"Don't you ever think of anything but d'Anconia Copper?" Jim asked him once.

"No."

"It seems to me that there are other things in the world."

"Let others think about them."

"Isn't that a very selfish attitude?"

"It is."

"What are you after?"

"Money."

"Don't you have enough?"

"In his lifetime, every one of my ancestors raised the production of d'Anconia Copper by about ten per cent. I intend to raise it by one hundred."

"*What for?*" Jim asked, in sarcastic imitation of Francisco's voice.

"When I die, I hope to go to heaven—whatever the hell that is-and I want to be able to afford the price of admission."

“Virtue is the price of admission,” Jim said haughtily.

“That’s what I mean, James. So I want to be prepared to claim the greatest virtue of all—that I was a man who made money.”

“Any grafter can make money.”

“James, you ought to discover some day that words have an exact meaning.”

Francisco smiled; it was a smile of radiant mockery. Watching them, Dagny thought suddenly of the difference between Francisco and her brother Jim. Both of them smiled derisively. But Francisco seemed to laugh at things because he saw something much greater. Jim laughed as if he wanted to let nothing remain great.

She noticed the particular quality of Francisco’s smile again, one night, when she sat with him and Eddie at a bonfire they had built in the woods. The glow of the fire enclosed them within a fence of broken, moving strips that held pieces of tree trunks, branches and distant stars. She felt as if there were nothing beyond that fence, nothing but black emptiness, with the hint of some breath-stopping, frightening promise ... like the future. But the future, she thought, would be like Francisco’s smile, *there* was the key to it, the advance warning of its nature -in his face in the firelight under the pine branches—and suddenly she felt an unbearable happiness, unbearable because it was too full and she had no way to express it. She glanced at Eddie. He was looking at Francisco. In some quiet way of his own, Eddie felt as she did.

“Why do you like Francisco?” she asked him weeks later, when Francisco was gone.

Eddie looked astonished; it had never occurred to him that the feeling could be questioned. He said, “He makes me feel safe.”

She said, “He makes me expect excitement and danger.”

Francisco was sixteen, next summer, the day when she stood alone with him on the summit of a cliff by the river, their shorts and shirts torn in their climb to the top. They stood looking down the Hudson; they had heard that on clear days one could see New York in the distance. But they saw only a haze made of three different kinds of light merging together: the river, the sky and the sun.

She knelt on a rock, leaning forward, trying to catch some hint of the city, the wind blowing her hair across her eyes. She glanced back over her shoulder—and saw that Francisco was not looking at the distance: he stood looking at her. It was an odd glance, intent and unsmiling. She remained still for a moment, her hands spread flat on the rock, her arms tensed to support the weight of her body; inexplicably, his glance made her aware of her pose, of her shoulder showing

through the torn shirt, of her long, scratched, sunburned legs slanting from the rock to the ground. She stood up angrily and backed away from him. And while throwing her head up, resentment in her eyes to meet the sternness in his, while feeling certain that his was a glance of condemnation and hostility, she heard herself asking him, a tone of smiling defiance in her voice:

“What do you like about me?”

He laughed; she wondered, aghast, what had made her say it. He answered, “There’s what I like about you,” pointing to the glittering rails of the Taggart station in the distance.

“It’s not mine,” she said, disappointed.

“What I like is that it’s going to be.”

She smiled, conceding his victory by being openly delighted. She did not know why he had looked at her so strangely; but she felt that he had seen some connection, which she could not grasp, between her body and something within her that would give her the strength to rule those rails some day.

He said brusquely, “Let’s see if we can see New York,” and jerked her by the arm to the edge of the cliff. She thought that he did not notice that he twisted her arm in a peculiar way, holding it down along the length of his side; it made her stand pressed against him, and she felt the warmth of the sun in the skin of his legs against hers. They looked far out into the distance, but they saw nothing ahead except a haze of light.

When Francisco left, that summer, she thought that his departure was like the crossing of a frontier which ended his childhood: he was to start college, that fall. Her turn would come next. She felt an eager impatience touched by the excitement of fear, as if he had leaped into an unknown danger. It was like the moment, years ago, when she had seen him dive first from a rock into the Hudson, had seen him vanish under the black water and had stood, knowing that he would reappear in an instant and that it would then be her turn to follow.

She dismissed the fear; dangers, to Francisco, were merely opportunities for another brilliant performance; there were no battles he could lose, no enemies to beat him. And then she thought of a remark she had heard a few years earlier. It was a strange remark—and it was strange that the words had remained in her mind, even though she had thought them senseless at the time. The man who said it was an old professor of mathematics, a friend of her father, who came to their country house for just that one visit. She liked his face, and she could still see the peculiar sadness in his eyes when he said to her father one evening, sitting on the terrace in the fading light, pointing to Francisco’s figure in the

garden, “That boy is vulnerable. He has too great a capacity for joy. What will he do with it in a world where there’s so little occasion for it?”

Francisco went to a great American school, which his father had chosen for him long ago. It was the most distinguished institution of learning left in the world, the Patrick Henry University of Cleveland. He did not come to visit her in New York, that winter, even though he was only a night’s journey away. They did not write to each other, they had never done it. But she knew that he would come back to the country for one summer month.

There were a few times, that winter, when she felt an undefined apprehension : the professor’s words kept returning to her mind, as a warning which she could not explain. She dismissed them. When she thought of Francisco, she felt the steadying assurance that she would have another month as an advance against the future, as a proof that the world she saw ahead was real, even though it was not the world of those around her.

“Hi, Slug!”

“Hi, Frisco!”

Standing on the hillside, in the first moment of seeing him again, she grasped suddenly the nature of that world which they, together, held against all others. It was only an instant’s pause, she felt her cotton skirt beating in the wind against her knees, felt the sun on her eyelids, and the upward thrust of such an immense relief that she ground her feet into the grass under her sandals, because she thought she would rise, weightless, through the wind.

It was a sudden sense of freedom and safety—because she realized that she knew nothing about the events of his life, had never known and would never need to know. The world of chance—of families, meals, schools, people, of aimless people dragging the load of some unknown guilt—was not theirs, could not change him, could not matter. He and she had never spoken of the things that happened to them, but only of what they thought and of what they would do.... She looked at him silently, as if a voice within her were saying: Not the things that are, but the things we’ll make ... We are not to be stopped, you and I ... Forgive me the fear, if I thought I could lose you to them—forgive me the doubt, they’ll never reach you—I’ll never be afraid for you again....

He, too, stood looking at her for a moment—and it seemed to her that it was not a look of greeting after an absence, but the look of someone who had thought of her every day of that year. She could not be certain, it was only an instant, so brief that just as she caught it, he was turning to point at the birch tree behind him and saying in the tone of their childhood game:

"I wish you'd learn to run faster. I'll always have to wait for you."

"Will you wait for me?" she asked gaily.

He answered, without smiling, "Always."

As they went up the hill to the house, he spoke to Eddie, while she walked silently by his side. She felt that there was a new reticence between them which, strangely, was a new kind of intimacy.

She did not question him about the university. Days later, she asked him only whether he liked it.

"They're teaching a lot of drivel nowadays," he answered, "but there are a few courses I like."

"Have you made any friends there?"

"Two."

He told her nothing else.

Jim was approaching his senior year in a college in New York. His studies had given him a manner of odd, quavering belligerence, as if he had found a new weapon. He addressed Francisco once, without provocation, stopping him in the middle of the lawn to say in a tone of aggressive self-righteousness:

"I think that now that you've reached college age, you ought to learn something about ideals. It's time to forget your selfish greed and give some thought to your social responsibilities, because I think that all those millions you're going to inherit are not for your personal pleasure, they are a trust for the benefit of the underprivileged and the poor, because I think that the person who doesn't realize this is the most depraved type of human being."

Francisco answered courteously, "It is not advisable, James, to venture unsolicited opinions. You should spare yourself the embarrassing discovery of their exact value to your listener."

Dagny asked him, as they walked away, "Are there many men like Jim in the world?"

Francisco laughed. "A great many."

"Don't you mind it?"

"No. I don't have to deal with them. Why do you ask that?"

"Because I think they're dangerous in some way ... I don't know how ..."

"Good God, Dagny! Do you expect me to be afraid of an object like James?"

It was days later, when they were alone, walking through the woods on the shore of the river, that she asked:

"Francisco, what's the most depraved type of human being?"

"The man without a purpose."

She was looking at the straight shafts of the trees that stood against the great, sudden, shining spread of space beyond. The forest was dim and cool, but the outer branches caught the hot, silver sunrays from the water. She wondered why she enjoyed the sight, when she had never taken any notice of the country around her, why she was so aware of her enjoyment, of her movements, of her body in the process of walking. She did not want to look at Francisco. She felt that his presence seemed more intensely real when she kept her eyes away from him, almost as if the stressed awareness of herself came from him, like the sunlight from the water.

“You think you’re good, don’t you?” he asked.

“I always did,” she answered defiantly, without turning.

“Well, let me see you prove it. Let me see how far you’ll rise with Taggart Transcontinental. No matter how good you are, I’ll expect you to wring everything you’ve got, trying to be still better. And when you’ve worn yourself out to reach a goal, I’ll expect you to start for another.”

“Why do you think that I care to prove anything to you?” she asked.

“Want me to answer?”

“No,” she whispered, her eyes fixed upon the other shore of the river in the distance.

She heard him chuckling, and after a while he said, “Dagny, there’s nothing of any importance in life—except how well you do your work. Nothing. Only that. Whatever else you are, will come from that. It’s the only measure of human value. All the codes of ethics they’ll try to ram down your throat are just so much paper money put out by swindlers to fleece people of their virtues. The code of competence is the only system of morality that’s on a gold standard. When you grow up, you’ll know what I mean.”

“I know it now. But ... Francisco, why are you and I the only ones who seem to know it?”

“Why should you care about the others?”

“Because I like to understand things, and there’s something about people that I can’t understand.”

“What?”

“Well, I’ve always been unpopular in school and it didn’t bother me, but now I’ve discovered the reason. It’s an impossible kind of reason. They dislike me, not because I do things badly, but because I do them well. They dislike me because I’ve always had the best grades in the class. I don’t even have to study. I always get A’s. Do you suppose I should try to get D’s for a change and become

the most popular girl in school?”

Francisco stopped, looked at her and slapped her face.

What she felt was contained in a single instant, while the ground rocked under her feet, in a single blast of emotion within her. She knew that she would have killed any other person who struck her; she felt the violent fury which would have given her the strength for it—and as violent a pleasure that Francisco had done it. She felt pleasure from the dull, hot pain in her cheek and from the taste of blood in the corner of her mouth. She felt pleasure in what she suddenly grasped about him, about herself and about his motive.

She braced her feet to stop the dizziness, she held her head straight and stood facing him in the consciousness of a new power, feeling herself his equal for the first time, looking at him with a mocking smile of triumph.

“Did I hurt you as much as that?” she asked.

He looked astonished; the question and the smile were not those of a child. He answered, “Yes—if it pleases you.”

“It does.”

“Don’t ever do that again. Don’t crack jokes of that kind.”

“Don’t be a fool. Whatever made you think that I cared about being popular?”

“When you grow up, you’ll understand what sort of unspeakable thing you said.”

“I understand it now.”

He turned abruptly, took out his handkerchief and dipped it in the water of the river. “Come here,” he ordered.

She laughed, stepping back. “Oh no. I want to keep it as it is. I hope it swells terribly. I like it.”

He looked at her for a long moment. He said slowly, very earnestly, “Dagny, you’re wonderful.”

“I thought that you always thought so,” she answered, her voice insolently casual.

When she came home, she told her mother that she had cut her lip by falling against a rock. It was the only lie she ever told. She did not do it to protect Francisco; she did it because she felt, for some reason which she could not define, that the incident was a secret too precious to share.

Next summer, when Francisco came, she was sixteen. She started running down the hill to meet him, but stopped abruptly. He saw it, stopped, and they stood for a moment, looking at each other across the distance of a long, green slope. It was he who walked up toward her, walked very slowly, while she stood

waiting.

When he approached, she smiled innocently, as if unconscious of any contest intended or won.

“You might like to know,” she said, “that I have a job on the railroad. Night operator at Rockdale.”

He laughed. “All right, Taggart Transcontinental, now it’s a race. Let’s see who’ll do greater honor, you—to Nat Taggart, or I—to Sebastián d’Anconia.”

That winter, she stripped her life down to the bright simplicity of a geometrical drawing: a few straight lines—to and from the engineering college in the city each day, to and from her job at Rockdale Station each night—and the closed circle of her room, a room littered with diagrams of motors, blueprints of steel structures, and railroad timetables.

Mrs. Taggart watched her daughter in unhappy bewilderment. She could have forgiven all the omissions, but one: Dagny showed no sign of interest in men, no romantic inclination whatever. Mrs. Taggart did not approve of extremes; she had been prepared to contend with an extreme of the opposite kind, if necessary; she found herself thinking that this was worse. She felt embarrassed when she had to admit that her daughter, at seventeen, did not have a single admirer.

“Dagny and Francisco d’Anconia?” she said, smiling ruefully, in answer to the curiosity of her friends. “Oh no, it’s not a romance. It’s an international industrial cartel of some kind. That’s all they seem to care about.”

Mrs. Taggart heard James say one evening, in the presence of guests, a peculiar tone of satisfaction in his voice, “Dagny, even though you were named after her, you really look more like Nat Taggart than like that first Dagny Taggart, the famous beauty who was his wife.” Mrs. Taggart did not know which offended her most: that James said it or that Dagny accepted it happily as a compliment.

She would never have a chance, thought Mrs. Taggart, to form some conception of her own daughter. Dagny was only a figure hurrying in and out of the apartment, a slim figure in a leather jacket, with a raised collar, a short skirt and long show-girl legs. She walked, cutting across a room, with a masculine, straight-line abruptness, but she had a peculiar grace of motion that was swift, tense and oddly, challengingly feminine.

At times, catching a glimpse of Dagny’s face, Mrs. Taggart caught an expression which she could not quite define: it was much more than gaiety, it was the look of such an untouched purity of enjoyment that she found it abnormal, too: no young girl could be so insensitive as to have discovered no

sadness in life. Her daughter, she concluded, was incapable of emotion.

"Dagny," she asked once, "don't you ever want to have a good time?" Dagny looked at her incredulously and answered, "What do you think I'm having?"

The decision to give her daughter a formal debut cost Mrs. Taggart a great deal of anxious thought. She did not know whether she was introducing to New York society Miss Dagny Taggart of the Social Register or the night operator of Rockdale Station; she was inclined to believe it was more truly this last; and she felt certain that Dagny would reject the idea of such an occasion. She was astonished when Dagny accepted it with inexplicable eagerness, for once like a child.

She was astonished again, when she saw Dagny dressed for the party. It was the first feminine dress she had ever worn—a gown of white chiffon with a huge skirt that floated like a cloud. Mrs. Taggart had expected her to look like a preposterous contrast. Dagny looked like a beauty. She seemed both older and more radiantly innocent than usual; standing in front of a mirror, she held her head as Nat Taggart's wife would have held it.

"Dagny," Mrs. Taggart said gently, reproachfully, "do you see how beautiful you can be when you want to?"

"Yes," said Dagny, without any astonishment.

The ballroom of the Wayne-Falkland Hotel had been decorated under Mrs. Taggart's direction; she had an artist's taste, and the setting of that evening was her masterpiece. "Dagny, there are things I would like you to learn to notice," she said, "lights, colors, flowers, music. They are not as negligible as you might think." "I've never thought they're negligible," Dagny answered happily. For once, Mrs. Taggart felt a bond between them; Dagny was looking at her with a child's grateful trust. "They're the things that make life beautiful," said Mrs. Taggart. "I want this evening to be very beautiful for you, Dagny. The first ball is the most romantic event of one's life."

To Mrs. Taggart, the greatest surprise was the moment when she saw Dagny standing under the lights, looking at the ballroom. This was not a child, not a girl, but a woman of such confident, dangerous power that Mrs. Taggart stared at her with shocked admiration. In an age of casual, cynical, indifferent routine, among people who held themselves as if they were not flesh, but meat—Dagny's bearing seemed almost indecent, because this was the way a woman would have faced a ballroom centuries ago, when the act of displaying one's half-naked body for the admiration of men was an act of daring, when it had meaning, and but one meaning, acknowledged by all as a high adventure. And this—thought

Mrs. Taggart, smiling—was the girl she had believed to be devoid of sexual capacity. She felt an immense relief, and a touch of amusement at the thought that a discovery of this kind should make her feel relieved.

The relief lasted only for a few hours. At the end of the evening, she saw Dagny in a corner of the ballroom, sitting on a balustrade as if it were a fence rail, her legs dangling under the chiffon skirt as if she were dressed in slacks. She was talking to a couple of helpless young men, her face contemptuously empty.

Neither Dagny nor Mrs. Taggart said a word when they rode home together. But hours later, on a sudden impulse, Mrs. Taggart went to her daughter's room. Dagny stood by the window, still wearing the white evening gown; it looked like a cloud supporting a body that now seemed too thin for it, a small body with sagging shoulders. Beyond the window, the clouds were gray in the first light of morning.

When Dagny turned, Mrs. Taggart saw only puzzled helplessness in her face; the face was calm, but something about it made Mrs. Taggart wish she had not wished that her daughter should discover sadness.

"Mother, do they think it's exactly in reverse?" she asked.

"What?" asked Mrs. Taggart, bewildered.

"The things you were talking about. The lights and the flowers. Do they expect those things to make them romantic, not the other way around?"

"Darling, what do you mean?"

"There wasn't a person there who enjoyed it," she said, her voice lifeless, "or who thought or felt anything at all. They moved about, and they said the same dull things they say anywhere. I suppose they thought the lights would make it brilliant."

"Darling, you take everything too seriously. One is not supposed to be intellectual at a ball. One is simply supposed to be gay."

"How? By being stupid?"

"I mean, for instance, didn't you enjoy meeting the young men?"

"What men? There wasn't a man there I couldn't squash ten of."

Days later, sitting at her desk at Rockdale Station, feeling light heartedly at home, Dagny thought of the party and shrugged in contemptuous reproach at her own disappointment. She looked up: it was spring and there were leaves on the tree branches in the darkness outside; the air was still and warm. She asked herself what she had expected from that party. She did not know. But she felt it again, here, now, as she sat slouched over a battered desk, looking out into the

darkness: a sense of expectation without object, rising through her body, slowly, like a warm liquid. She slumped forward across the desk, lazily, feeling neither exhaustion nor desire to work.

When Francisco came, that summer, she told him about the party and about her disappointment. He listened silently, looking at her for the first time with that glance of unmoving mockery which he reserved for others, a glance that seemed to see too much. She felt as if he heard, in her words, more than she knew she told him.

She saw the same glance in his eyes on the evening when she left him too early. They were alone, sitting on the shore of the river. She had another hour before she was due at Rockdale. There were long, thin strips of fire in the sky, and red sparks floating lazily on the water. He had been silent for a long time, when she rose abruptly and told him that she had to go. He did not try to stop her; he leaned back, his elbows in the grass, and looked at her without moving; his glance seemed to say that he knew her motive. Hurrying angrily up the slope to the house, she wondered what had made her leave; she did not know; it had been a sudden restlessness that came from a feeling she did not identify till now: a feeling of expectation.

Each night, she drove the five miles from the country house to Rockdale. She came back at dawn, slept a few hours and got up with the rest of the household. She felt no desire to sleep. Undressing for bed in the first rays of the sun, she felt a tense, joyous, causeless impatience to face the day that was starting.

She saw Francisco's mocking glance again, across the net of a tennis court. She did not remember the beginning of that game; they had often played tennis together and he had always won. She did not know at what moment she decided that she would win, this time. When she became aware of it, it was no longer a decision or a wish, but a quiet fury rising within her. She did not know why she had to win; she did not know why it seemed so crucially, urgently necessary; she knew only that she had to and that she would.

It seemed easy to play; it was as if her will had vanished and someone's power were playing for her. She watched Francisco's figure -a tall, swift figure, the suntan of his arms stressed by his short white shirt sleeves. She felt an arrogant pleasure in seeing the skill of his movements, because *this* was the thing which she would beat, so that his every expert gesture became her victory, and the brilliant competence of his body became the triumph of hers.

She felt the rising pain of exhaustion—not knowing that it was pain, feeling it only in sudden stabs that made her aware of some part of her body for an instant,

to be forgotten in the next: her arm socket—her shoulder blades—her hips, with the white shorts sticking to her skin -the muscles of her legs, when she leaped to meet the ball, but did not remember whether she came down to touch the ground again—her eyelids, when the sky went dark red and the ball came at her through the darkness like a whirling white name—the thin, hot wire that shot from her ankle, up her back, and went on shooting straight across the air, driving the ball at Francisco's figure.... She felt an exultant pleasure—because every stab of pain begun in her body had to end in his, because he was being exhausted as she was—what she did to herself, she was doing it also to him—this was what he felt—this was what she drove him to—it was not her pain that she felt or her body, but his.

In the moments when she saw his face, she saw that he was laughing. He was looking at her as if he understood. He was playing, not to win, but to make it harder for her—sending his shots wild to make her run —losing points to see her twist her body in an agonizing backhand—standing still, letting her think he would miss, only to let his arm shoot out casually at the last moment and send the ball back with such force that she knew she would miss it. She felt as if she could not move again, not ever—and it was strange to find herself landing suddenly at the other side of the court, smashing the ball in time, smashing it as if she wished it to burst to pieces, as if she wished it were Francisco's face.

Just once more, she thought, even if the next one would crack the bones of her arm ... Just once more, even if the air which she forced down in gasps past her tight, swollen throat, would be stopped altogether ... Then she felt nothing, no pain, no muscles, only the thought that she had to beat him, to see him exhausted, to see him collapse, and then she would be free to die in the next moment.

She won. Perhaps it was his laughing that made him lose, for once. He walked to the net, while she stood still, and threw his racket across, at her feet, as if knowing that this was what she wanted. He walked out of the court and fell down on the grass of the lawn, collapsing, his head on his arm.

She approached him slowly. She stood over him, looking down at his body stretched at her feet, looking at his sweat-drenched shirt and the strands of his hair spilled across his arm. He raised his head. His glance moved slowly up the line of her legs, to her shorts, to her blouse, to her eyes. It was a mocking glance that seemed to see straight through her clothes and through her mind. And it seemed to say that he had won.

She sat at her desk at Rockdale, that night, alone in the old station building,

looking at the sky in the window. It was the hour she liked best, when the top panes of the window grew lighter, and the rails of the track outside became threads of blurred silver across the lower panes. She turned off her lamp and watched the vast, soundless motion of light over a motionless earth. Things stood still, not a leaf trembled on the branches, while the sky slowly lost its color and became an expanse that looked like a spread of glowing water.

Her telephone was silent at this hour, almost as if movement had stopped everywhere along the system. She heard steps approaching outside, suddenly, close to the door. Francisco came in. He had never come here before, but she was not astonished to see him.

“What are you doing up at this hour?” she asked.

“I didn’t feel like sleeping.”

“How did you get here? I didn’t hear your car.”

“I walked.”

Moments passed before she realized that she had not asked him why he came and that she did not want to ask it.

He wandered through the room, looking at the clusters of waybills that hung on the walls, at the calendar with a picture of the Taggart Comet caught in a proud surge of motion toward the onlooker. He seemed casually at home, as if he felt that the place belonged to them, as they always felt wherever they went together. But he did not seem to want to talk. He asked a few questions about her job, then kept silent.

As the light grew outside, movement grew down on the line and the telephone started ringing in the silence. She turned to her work. He sat in a corner, one leg thrown over the arm of his chair, waiting.

She worked swiftly, feeling inordinately clear-headed. She found pleasure in the rapid precision of her hands. She concentrated on the sharp, bright sound of the phone, on the figures of train numbers, car numbers, order numbers. She was conscious of nothing else.

But when a thin sheet of paper fluttered down to the floor and she bent to pick it up, she was suddenly as intently conscious of that particular moment, of herself and her own movement. She noticed her gray linen skirt, the rolled sleeve of her gray blouse and her naked arm reaching down for the paper. She felt her heart stop causelessly in the kind of gasp one feels in moments of anticipation. She picked up the paper and turned back to her desk.

It was almost full daylight. A train went past the station, without stopping. In the purity of the morning light, the long line of car roofs melted into a silver

string, and the train seemed suspended above the ground, not quite touching it, going past through the air. The floor of the station trembled, and glass rattled in the windows. She watched the train's flight with a smile of excitement. She glanced at Francisco: he was looking at her, with the same smile.

When the day operator arrived, she turned the station over to him, and they walked out into the morning air. The sun had not yet risen and the air seemed radiant in its stead. She felt no exhaustion. She felt as if she were just getting up.

She started toward her car, but Francisco said, "Let's walk home. We'll come for the car later."

"All right."

She was not astonished and she did not mind the prospect of walking five miles. It seemed natural; natural to the moment's peculiar reality that was sharply clear, but cut off from everything, immediate, but disconnected, like a bright island in a wall of fog, the heightened, unquestioning reality one feels when one is drunk.

The road led through the woods. They left the highway for an old trail that went twisting among the trees across miles of untouched country. There were no traces of human existence around them. Old ruts, overgrown with grass, made human presence seem more distant, adding the distance of years to the distance of miles. A haze of twilight remained over the ground, but in the breaks between the tree trunks there were leaves that hung in patches of shining green and seemed to light the forest. The leaves hung still. They walked, alone to move through a motionless world. She noticed suddenly that they had not said a word for a long time.

They came to a clearing. It was a small hollow at the bottom of a shaft made of straight rock hillsides. A stream cut across the grass, and tree branches flowed low to the ground, like a curtain of green fluid. The sound of the water stressed the silence. The distant cut of open sky made the place seem more hidden. Far above, on the crest of a hill, one tree caught the first rays of sunlight.

They stopped and looked at each other. She knew, only when he did it, that she had known he would. He seized her, she felt her lips in his mouth, felt her arms grasping him in violent answer, and knew for the first time how much she had wanted him to do it.

She felt a moment's rebellion and a hint of fear. He held her, pressing the length of his body against hers with a tense, purposeful insistence, his hand moving over her breasts as if he were learning a proprietor's intimacy with her body, a shocking intimacy that needed no consent from her, no permission. She

tried to pull herself away, but she only leaned back against his arms long enough to see his face and his smile, the smile that told her she had given him permission long ago. She thought that she must escape; instead, it was she who pulled his head down to find his mouth again.

She knew that fear was useless, that he would do what he wished, that the decision was his, that he left nothing possible to her except the thing she wanted most—to submit. She had no conscious realization of his purpose, her vague knowledge of it was wiped out, she had no power to believe it clearly, in this moment, to believe it about herself, she knew only that she was afraid—yet what she felt was as if she were crying to him: Don't ask me for it—oh, don't ask me—do it!

She braced her feet for an instant, to resist, but his mouth was pressed to hers and they went down to the ground together, never breaking their lips apart. She lay still—as the motionless, then the quivering object of an act which he did simply, unhesitatingly, as of right, the right of the unendurable pleasure it gave them.

He named what it meant to both of them in the first words he spoke afterwards. He said, "We had to learn it from each other." She looked at his long figure stretched on the grass beside her, he wore black slacks and a black shirt, her eyes stopped on the belt pulled tight across his slender waistline, and she felt the stab of an emotion that was like a gasp of pride, pride in her ownership of his body. She lay on her back, looking up at the sky, feeling no desire to move or think or know that there was any time beyond this moment.

When she came home, when she lay in bed, naked because her body had become an unfamiliar possession, too precious for the touch of a nightgown, because it gave her pleasure to feel naked and to feel as if the white sheets of her bed were touched by Francisco's body—when she thought that she would not sleep, because she did not want to rest and lose the most wonderful exhaustion she had ever known—her last thought was of the times when she had wanted to express, but found no way to do it, an instant's knowledge of a feeling greater than happiness, the feeling of one's blessing upon the whole of the earth, the feeling of being in love with the fact that one exists and in this kind of world; she thought that the act she had learned was the way one expressed it. If this was a thought of the gravest importance, she did not know it; nothing could be grave in a universe from which the concept of pain had been wiped out; she was not there to weigh her conclusion; she was asleep, a faint smile on her face, in a silent, luminous room filled with the light of morning.

That summer, she met him in the woods, in hidden corners by the river, on the floor of an abandoned shack, in the cellar of the house. These were the only times when she learned to feel a sense of beauty—by looking up at old wooden rafters or at the steel plate of an air-conditioning machine that whirled tensely, rhythmically above their heads. She wore slacks or cotton summer dresses, yet she was never so feminine as when she stood beside him, sagging in his arms, abandoning herself to anything he wished, in open acknowledgment of his power to reduce her to helplessness by the pleasure he had the power to give her. He taught her every manner of sensuality he could invent. “Isn’t it wonderful that our bodies can give us so much pleasure?” he said to her once, quite simply. They were happy and radiantly innocent. They were both incapable of the conception that joy is sin.

They kept their secret from the knowledge of others, not as a shameful guilt, but as a thing that was immaculately theirs, beyond anyone’s right of debate or appraisal. She knew the general doctrine on sex, held by people in one form or another, the doctrine that sex was an ugly weakness of man’s lower nature, to be condoned regretfully. She experienced an emotion of chastity that made her shrink, not from the desires of her body, but from any contact with the minds who held this doctrine.

That winter, Francisco came to see her in New York, at unpredictable intervals. He would fly down from Cleveland, without warning, twice a week, or he would vanish for months. She would sit on the floor of her room, surrounded by charts and blueprints, she would hear a knock at her door and snap, “I’m busy!” then hear a mocking voice ask, “Are you?” and leap to her feet to throw the door open, to find him standing there. They would go to an apartment he had rented in the city, a small apartment in a quiet neighborhood. “Francisco,” she asked him once, in sudden astonishment, “I’m your mistress, am I not?” He laughed. “That’s what you are.” She felt the pride a woman is supposed to experience at being granted the title of wife.

In the many months of his absence, she never wondered whether he was true to her or not; she knew he was. She knew, even though she was too young to know the reason, that indiscriminate desire and unselective indulgence were possible only to those who regarded sex and themselves as evil.

She knew little about Francisco’s life. It was his last year in college; he seldom spoke of it, and she never questioned him. She suspected that he was working too hard, because she saw, at times, the unnaturally bright look of his face, the look of exhilaration that comes from driving one’s energy beyond its

limit. She laughed at him once, boasting that she was an old employee of Taggart Transcontinental, while he had not started to work for a living. He said, "My father refuses to let me work for d'Anconia Copper until I graduate." "When did you learn to be obedient?" "I must respect his wishes. He is the owner of d'Anconia Copper.... He is not, however, the owner of all the copper companies in the world." There was a hint of secret amusement in his smile.

She did not learn the story until the next fall, when he had graduated and returned to New York after a visit to his father in Buenos Aires. Then he told her that he had taken two courses of education during the last four years: one at the Patrick Henry University, the other in a copper foundry on the outskirts of Cleveland. "I like to learn things for myself," he said. He had started working at the foundry as furnace boy, when he was sixteen—and now, at twenty, he owned it. He acquired his first title of property, with the aid of some inaccuracy about his age, on the day when he received his university diploma, and he sent them both to his father.

He showed her a photograph of the foundry. It was a small, grimy place, disreputable with age, battered by years of a losing struggle; above its entrance gate, like a new flag on the mast of a derelict, hung the sign: d'Anconia Copper.

The public relations man of his father's office in New York had moaned, outraged, "But, Don Francisco, you can't do that! What will the public think? *That* name on a dump of this kind?" "It's my name," Francisco had answered.

When he entered his father's office in Buenos Aires, a large room, severe and modern as a laboratory, with photographs of the properties of d'Anconia Copper as sole ornament on its walls—photographs of the greatest mines, ore docks and foundries in the world—he saw, in the place of honor, facing his father's desk, a photograph of the Cleveland foundry with the new sign above its gate.

His father's eyes moved from the photograph to Francisco's face as he stood in front of the desk.

"Isn't it a little too soon?" his father asked.

"I couldn't have stood four years of nothing but lectures."

"Where did you get the money for your first payment on that property?"

"By playing the New York stock market."

"*What?* Who taught you to do that?"

"It is not difficult to judge which industrial ventures will succeed and which won't."

"Where did you get the money to play with?"

"From the allowance you sent me, sir, and from my wages."

“When did you have time to watch the stock market?”

“While I was writing a thesis on the influence—upon subsequent metaphysical systems—of Aristotle’s theory of the Immovable Mover.”

Francisco’s stay in New York was brief, that fall. His father was sending him to Montana as assistant superintendent of a d’Anconia mine. “Oh well,” he said to Dagny, smiling, “my father does not think it advisable to let me rise too fast. I would not ask him to take me on faith. If he wants a factual demonstration, I shall comply.” In the spring, Francisco came back—as head of the New York office of d’Anconia Copper.

She did not see him often in the next two years. She never knew where he was, in what city or on what continent, the day after she had seen him. He always came to her unexpectedly—and she liked it, because it made him a continuous presence in her life, like the ray of a hidden light that could hit her at any moment.

Whenever she saw him in his office, she thought of his hands as she had seen them on the wheel of a motorboat: he drove his business with the same smooth, dangerous, confidently mastered speed. But one small incident remained in her mind as a shock: it did not fit him. She saw him standing at the window of his office, one evening, looking at the brown winter twilight of the city. He did not move for a long time. His face was hard and tight; it had the look of an emotion she had never believed possible to him: of bitter, helpless anger. He said, “There’s something wrong in the world. There’s always been. Something no one has ever named or explained.” He would not tell her what it was.

When she saw him again, no trace of that incident remained in his manner. It was spring and they stood together on the roof terrace of a restaurant, the light silk of her evening gown blowing in the wind against his tall figure in formal black clothes. They looked at the city. In the dining room behind them, the sounds of the music were a concert étude by Richard Halley; Halley’s name was not known to many, but they had discovered it and they loved his music. Francisco said, “We don’t have to look for skyscrapers in the distance, do we? We’ve reached them.” She smiled and said, “I think we’re going past them.... I’m almost afraid ... we’re on a speeding elevator of some kind.” “Sure. Afraid of what? Let it speed. Why should there be a limit?”

He was twenty-three when his father died and he went to Buenos Aires to take over the d’Anconia estate, now his. She did not see him for three years.

He wrote to her, at first, at random intervals. He wrote about d’Anconia Copper, about the world market, about issues affecting the interests of Taggart

Transcontinental. His letters were brief, written by hand, usually at night.

She was not unhappy in his absence. She, too, was making her first steps toward the control of a future kingdom. Among the leaders of industry, her father's friends, she heard it said that one had better watch the young d'Anconia heir; if that copper company had been great before, it would sweep the world now, under what his management promised to become. She smiled, without astonishment. There were moments when she felt a sudden, violent longing for him, but it was only impatience, not pain. She dismissed it, in the confident knowledge that they were both working toward a future that would bring them everything they wanted, including each other. Then his letters stopped.

She was twenty-four on that day of spring when the telephone rang on her desk, in an office of the Taggart Building. "Dagny," said a voice she recognized at once, "I'm at the Wayne-Falkland. Come to have dinner with me tonight. At seven." He said it without greeting, as if they had parted the day before. Because it took her a moment to regain the art of breathing, she realized for the first time how much that voice meant to her. "All right ... Francisco," she answered. They needed to say nothing else. She thought, replacing the receiver, that his return was natural and as she had always expected it to happen, except that she had not expected her sudden need to pronounce his name or the stab of happiness she felt while pronouncing it.

When she entered his hotel room, that evening, she stopped short. He stood in the middle of the room, looking at her—and she saw a smile that came slowly, involuntarily, as if he had lost the ability to smile and were astonished that he should regain it. He looked at her incredulously, not quite believing what she was or what he felt. His glance was like a plea, like the cry for help of a man who could never cry. At her entrance, he had started their old salute, he had started to say, "Hi—" but he did not finish it. Instead, after a moment, he said, "You're beautiful, Dagny." He said it as if it hurt him.

"Francisco, I—"

He shook his head, not to let her pronounce the words they had never said to each other—even though they knew that both had said and heard them in that moment.

He approached, he took her in his arms, he kissed her mouth and held her for a long time. When she looked up at his face, he was smiling down at her confidently, derisively. It was a smile that told her he was in control of himself, of her, of everything, and ordered her to forget what she had seen in that first moment. "Hi, Slug," he said.

Feeling certain of nothing except that she must not ask questions, she smiled and said, "Hi, Frisco."

She could have understood any change, but not the things she saw. There was no sparkle of life in his face, no hint of amusement; the face had become implacable. The plea of his first smile had not been a plea of weakness; he had acquired an air of determination that seemed merciless. He acted like a man who stood straight, under the weight of an unendurable burden. She saw what she could not have believed possible: that there were lines of bitterness in his face and that he looked tortured.

"Dagny, don't be astonished by anything I do," he said, "or by anything I may ever do in the future."

That was the only explanation he granted her, then proceeded to act as if there were nothing to explain.

She could feel no more than a faint anxiety; it was impossible to feel fear for his fate or in his presence. When he laughed, she thought they were back in the woods by the Hudson: he had not changed and never would.

The dinner was served in his room. She found it amusing to face him across a table laid out with the icy formality pertaining to excessive cost, in a hotel room designed as a European palace.

The Wayne-Falkland was the most distinguished hotel left on any continent. Its style of indolent luxury, of velvet drapes, sculptured panels and candlelight, seemed a deliberate contrast to its function: no one could afford its hospitality except men who came to New York on business, to settle transactions involving the world. She noticed that the manner of the waiters who served their dinner suggested a special deference to this particular guest of the hotel, and that Francisco did not notice it. He was indifferently at home. He had long since become accustomed to the fact that he was Senor d'Anconia of d'Anconia Copper.

But she thought it strange that he did not speak about his work. She had expected it to be his only interest, the first thing he would share with her. He did not mention it. He led her to talk, instead, about her job, her progress, and what she felt for Taggart Transcontinental. She spoke of it as she had always spoken to him, in the knowledge that he was the only one who could understand her passionate devotion. He made no comment, but he listened intently.

A waiter had turned on the radio for dinner music; they had paid no attention to it. But suddenly, a crash of sound jarred the room, almost as if a subterranean blast had struck the walls and made them tremble. The shock came, not from the

loudness, but from the quality of the sounds. It was Halley's new Concerto, recently written, the Fourth.

They sat in silence, listening to the statement of rebellion—the anthem of the triumph of the great victims who would refuse to accept pain. Francisco listened, looking out at the city.

Without transition or warning, he asked, his voice oddly unstressed, “Dagny, what would you say if I asked you to leave Taggart Transcontinental and let it go to hell, as it will when your brother takes over?”

“What would I say if you asked me to consider the idea of committing suicide?” she answered angrily.

He remained silent.

“Why did you say that?” she snapped. “I didn't think you'd joke about it. It's not like you.”

There was no touch of humor in his face. He answered quietly, gravely, “No. Of course. I shouldn't.”

She brought herself to question him about his work. He answered the questions; he volunteered nothing. She repeated to him the comments of the industrialists about the brilliant prospects of d'Anconia Copper under his management. “That's true,” he said, his voice lifeless.

In sudden anxiety, not knowing what prompted her, she asked, “Francisco, why did you come to New York?”

He answered slowly, “To see a friend who called for me.”

“Business?”

Looking past her, as if answering a thought of his own, a faint smile of bitter amusement on his face, but his voice strangely soft and sad, he answered:

“Yes.”

It was long past midnight when she awakened in bed by his side. No sounds came from the city below. The stillness of the room made life seem suspended for a while. Relaxed in happiness and in complete exhaustion, she turned lazily to glance at him. He lay on his back, half-propped by a pillow. She saw his profile against the foggy glow of the night sky in the window. He was awake, his eyes were open. He held his mouth closed like a man lying in resignation in unbearable pain, bearing it, making no attempt to hide it.

She was too frightened to move. He felt her glance and turned to her. He shuddered suddenly, he threw off the blanket, he looked at her naked body, then he fell forward and buried his face between her breasts. He held her shoulders, hanging onto her convulsively. She heard the words, muffled, his mouth pressed

to her skin:

“I can’t give it up! I can’t!”

“What?” she whispered.

“You.”

“Why should—”

“And everything.”

“Why should you give it up?”

“Dagny! Help me to remain. To refuse. Even though he’s right!”

She asked evenly, “To refuse what, Francisco?”

He did not answer, only pressed his face harder against her.

She lay very still, conscious of nothing but a supreme need of caution. His head on her breast, her hand caressing his hair gently, steadily, she lay looking up at the ceiling of the room, at the sculptured garlands faintly visible in the darkness, and she waited, numb with terror.

He moaned, “It’s right, but it’s so hard to do! Oh God, it’s so hard!”

After a while, he raised his head. He sat up. He had stopped trembling.

“What is it, Francisco?”

“I can’t tell you.” His voice was simple, open, without attempt to disguise suffering, but it was a voice that obeyed him now. “You’re not ready to hear it.”

“I want to help you.”

“You can’t.”

“You said, to help you refuse.”

“I can’t refuse.”

“Then let me share it with you.”

He shook his head.

He sat looking down at her, as if weighing a question. Then he shook his head again, in answer to himself.

“If I’m not sure I can stand it,” he said, and the strange new note in his voice was tenderness, “how could you?”

She said slowly, with effort, trying to keep herself from screaming, “Francisco, I have to know.”

“Will you forgive me? I know you’re frightened, and it’s cruel. But will you do this for me—will you let it go, just let it go, and don’t ask me anything?”

“I—”

“That’s all you can do for me. Will you?”

“Yes, Francisco.”

“Don’t be afraid for me. It was just this once. It won’t happen to me again. It

will become much easier ... later.”

“If I could—”

“No. Go to sleep, dearest.”

It was the first time he had ever used that word.

In the morning, he faced her openly, not avoiding her anxious glance, but saying nothing about it. She saw both serenity and suffering in the calm of his face, an expression like a smile of pain, though he was not smiling. Strangely, it made him look younger. He did not look like a man bearing torture now, but like a man who sees that which makes the torture worth bearing.

She did not question him. Before leaving, she asked only, “When will I see you again?”

He answered, “I don’t know. Don’t wait for me, Dagny. Next time we meet, you will not want to see me. I will have a reason for the things I’ll do. But I can’t tell you the reason and you will be right to damn me. I am not committing the contemptible act of asking you to take me on faith. You have to live by your own knowledge and judgment. You will damn me. You will be hurt. Try not to let it hurt you too much. Remember that I told you this and that it was all I could tell you.”

She heard nothing from him or about him for a year. When she began to hear gossip and to read newspaper stories, she did not believe, at first, that they referred to Francisco d’Anconia. After a while, she had to believe it.

She read the story of the party he gave on his yacht, in the harbor of Valparaiso; the guests wore bathing suits, and an artificial rain of champagne and flower petals kept falling upon the decks throughout the night.

She read the story of the party he gave at an Algerian desert resort; he built a pavilion of thin sheets of ice and presented every woman guest with an ermine wrap, as a gift to be worn for the occasion, on condition that they remove their wraps, then their evening gowns, then all the rest, in tempo with the melting of the walls.

She read the accounts of the business ventures he undertook at lengthy intervals; the ventures were spectacularly successful and ruined his competitors, but he indulged in them as in an occasional sport, staging a sudden raid, then vanishing from the industrial scene for a year or two, leaving d’Anconia Copper to the management of his employees.

She read the interview where he said, “Why should I wish to make money? I have enough to permit three generations of descendants to have as good a time as I’m having.”

She saw him once, at a reception given by an ambassador in New York. He bowed to her courteously, he smiled, and he looked at her with a glance in which no past existed. She drew him aside. She said only, "Francisco, why?" "Why—what?" he asked. She turned away. "I warned you," he said. She did not try to see him again.

She survived it. She was able to survive it, because she did not believe in suffering. She faced with astonished indignation the ugly fact of feeling pain, and refused to let it matter. Suffering was a senseless accident, it was not part of life as she saw it. She would not allow pain to become important. She had no name for the kind of resistance she offered, for the emotion from which the resistance came; but the words that stood as its equivalent in her mind were: It does not count -it is not to be taken seriously. She knew these were the words, even in the moments when there was nothing left within her but screaming and she wished she could lose the faculty of consciousness so that it would not tell her that what could not be true was true. Not to be taken seriously—an immovable certainty within her kept repeating—pain and ugliness are never to be taken seriously.

She fought it. She recovered. Years helped her to reach the day when she could face her memories indifferently, then the day when she felt no necessity to face them. It was finished and of no concern to her any longer.

There had been no other men in her life. She did not know whether this had made her unhappy. She had had no time to know. She found the clean, brilliant sense of life as she wanted it—in her work. Once, Francisco had given her the same sense, a feeling that belonged with her work and in her world. The men she had met since were like the men she met at her first ball.

She had won the battle against her memories. But one form of torture remained, untouched by the years, the torture of the word "why?"

Whatever the tragedy he met, why had Francisco taken the ugliest way of escape, as ignoble as the way of some cheap alcoholic? The boy she had known could not have become a useless coward. An incomparable mind could not turn its ingenuity to the invention of melting ballrooms. Yet he had and did, and there was no explanation to make it conceivable and to let her forget him in peace. She could not doubt the fact of what he had been; she could not doubt the fact of what he had become; yet one made the other impossible. At times, she almost doubted her own rationality or the existence of any rationality anywhere; but this was a doubt which she did not permit to anyone. Yet there was no explanation, no reason, no clue to any conceivable reason -and in all the days of ten years she

had found no hint of an answer.

No, she thought—as she walked through the gray twilight, past the windows of abandoned shops, to the Wayne-Falkland Hotel—no, there could be no answer. She would not seek it. It did not matter now.

The remnant of violence, the emotion rising as a thin trembling within her, was not for the man she was going to see; it was a cry of protest against a sacrilege—against the destruction of what had been greatness.

In a break between buildings, she saw the towers of the Wayne-Falkland. She felt a slight jolt, in her lungs and legs, that stopped her for an instant. Then she walked on evenly.

By the time she walked through the marble lobby, to the elevator, then down the wide, velvet-carpeted, soundless corridors of the Wayne-Falkland, she felt nothing but a cold anger that grew colder with every step.

She was certain of the anger when she knocked at his door. She heard his voice, answering, “Come in.” She jerked the door open and entered.

Francisco Domingo Carlos Andres Sebastián d’Anconia sat on the floor, playing marbles.

Nobody ever wondered whether Francisco d’Anconia was good-looking or not; it seemed irrelevant; when he entered a room, it was impossible to look at anyone else. His tall, slender figure had an air of distinction, too authentic to be modern, and he moved as if he had a cape floating behind him in the wind. People explained him by saying that he had the vitality of a healthy animal, but they knew dimly that that was not correct. He had the vitality of a healthy human being, a thing so rare that no one could identify it. He had the power of certainty.

Nobody described his appearance as Latin, yet the word applied to him, not in its present, but in its original sense, not pertaining to Spain, but to ancient Rome. His body seemed designed as an exercise in consistency of style, a style made of gauntness, of tight flesh, long legs and swift movements. His features had the fine precision of sculpture. His hair was black and straight, swept back. The suntan of his skin intensified the startling color of his eyes: they were a pure, clear blue. His face was open, its rapid changes of expression reflecting whatever he felt, as if he had nothing to hide. The blue eyes were still and changeless, never giving a hint of what he thought.

He sat on the floor of his drawing room, dressed in sleeping pajamas of thin black silk. The marbles spread on the carpet around him were made of the semi-precious stones of his native country: carnelian and rock crystal. He did not rise when Dagny entered. He sat looking up at her, and a crystal marble fell like a

teardrop out of his hand. He smiled, the unchanged, insolent, brilliant smile of his childhood.

“Hi, Slug!”

She heard herself answering, irresistibly, helplessly, happily:

“Hi, Frisco!”

She was looking at his face; it was the face she had known. It bore no mark of the kind of life he had led, nor of what she had seen on their last night together. There was no sign of tragedy, no bitterness, no tension—only the radiant mockery, matured and stressed, the look of dangerously unpredictable amusement, and the great, guiltless serenity of spirit. But this, she thought, was impossible; this was more shocking than all the rest.

His eyes were studying her: the battered coat thrown open, half-slipping off her shoulders, and the slender body in a gray suit that looked like an office uniform.

“If you came here dressed like this in order not to let me notice how lovely you are,” he said, “you miscalculated. You’re lovely. I wish I could tell you what a relief it is to see a face that’s intelligent though a woman’s. But you don’t want to hear it. That’s not what you came here for.”

The words were improper in so many ways, yet were said so lightly that they brought her back to reality, to anger and to the purpose of her visit. She remained standing, looking down at him, her face blank, refusing him any recognition of the personal, even of its power to offend her. She said, “I came here to ask you a question.”

“Go ahead.”

“When you told those reporters that you came to New York to witness the farce, which farce did you mean?”

He laughed aloud, like a man who seldom finds a chance to enjoy the unexpected.

“That’s what I like about you, Dagny. There are seven million people in the city of New York, at present. Out of seven million people, you are the only one to whom it could have occurred that I wasn’t talking about the Vail divorce scandal.”

“What were you talking about?”

“What alternative occurred to you?”

“The San Sebastián disaster.”

“That’s much more amusing than the Vail divorce scandal, isn’t it?”

She said in the solemn, merciless tone of a prosecutor, “You did it

consciously, cold-bloodedly and with full intention.”

“Don’t you think it would be better if you took your coat off and sat down?”

She knew she had made a mistake by betraying too much intensity. She turned coldly, removed her coat and threw it aside. He did not rise to help her. She sat down in an armchair. He remained on the floor, at some distance, but it seemed as if he were sitting at her feet.

“What was it I did with full intention?” he asked.

“The entire San Sebastián swindle.”

“What was my *full* intention?”

“That is what I want to know.”

He chuckled, as if she had asked him to explain in conversation a complex science requiring a lifetime of study.

“You knew that the San Sebastián mines were worthless,” she said. “You knew it before you began the whole wretched business.”

“Then why did I begin it?”

“Don’t start telling me that you gained nothing. I know it. I know you lost fifteen million dollars of your own money. Yet it was done on purpose.”

“Can you think of a motive that would prompt me to do it?”

“No. It’s inconceivable.”

“Is it? You assume that I have a great mind, a great knowledge and a great productive ability, so that anything I undertake must necessarily be successful. And then you claim that I had no desire to put out my best effort for the People’s State of Mexico. Inconceivable, isn’t it?”

“You knew, before you bought that property, that Mexico was in the hands of a looters’ government. You didn’t have to start a mining project for them.”

“No, I didn’t have to.”

“You didn’t give a damn about that Mexican government, one way or another, because—”

“You’re wrong about that.”

“—because you knew they’d seize those mines sooner or later. What you were after is your American stockholders.”

“That’s true.” He was looking straight at her, he was not smiling, his face was earnest. He added, “That’s part of the truth.”

“What’s the rest?”

“It was not all I was after.”

“What else?”

“That’s for you to figure out.”

"I came here because I wanted you to know that I am beginning to understand your purpose."

He smiled. "If you did, you wouldn't have come here."

"That's true. I *don't* understand and probably never shall. I am merely beginning to see part of it."

"Which part?"

"You had exhausted every other form of depravity and sought a new thrill by swindling people like Jim and his friends, in order to watch them squirm. I don't know what sort of corruption could make anyone enjoy that, but that's what you came to New York to see, at the right time."

"They certainly provided a spectacle of squirming on the grand scale. Your brother James in particular."

"They're rotten fools, but in this case their only crime was that they trusted you. They trusted your name and your honor."

Again, she saw the look of earnestness and again knew with certainty that it was genuine, when he said, "Yes. They did. I know it."

"And do you find it amusing?"

"No. I don't find it amusing at all."

He had continued playing with his marbles, absently, indifferently, taking a shot once in a while. She noticed suddenly the faultless accuracy of his aim, the skill of his hands. He merely flicked his wrist and sent a drop of stone shooting across the carpet to click sharply against another drop. She thought of his childhood and of the predictions that anything he did would be done superlatively.

"No," he said, "I don't find it amusing. Your brother James and his friends knew nothing about the copper-mining industry. They knew nothing about making money. They did not think it necessary to learn. They considered knowledge superfluous and judgment inessential. They observed that there I was in the world and that I made it my honor to know. They thought they could trust my honor. One does not betray a trust of this kind, does one?"

"Then you did betray it intentionally?"

"That's for you to decide. It was you who spoke about their trust and my honor. I don't think in such terms any longer...." He shrugged, adding, "I don't give a damn about your brother James and his friends. Their theory was not new, it has worked for centuries. But it wasn't foolproof. There is just one point that they overlooked. They thought it was safe to ride on my brain, because they assumed that the goal of my journey was wealth. All their calculations rested on

the premise that I wanted to make money. What if I didn't?"

"If you didn't, what did you want?"

"They never asked me that. Not to inquire about my aims, motives or desires is an essential part of their theory."

"If you didn't want to make money, what possible motive could you have had?"

"Any number of them. For instance, to spend it."

"To spend money on a certain, total failure?"

"How was I to know that those mines were a certain, total failure?"

"How could you help knowing it?"

"Quite simply. By giving it no thought."

"You started that project without giving it any thought?"

"No, not exactly. But suppose I slipped up? I'm only human. I made a mistake. I failed. I made a bad job of it." He flicked his wrist; a crystal marble shot, sparkling, across the floor and cracked violently against a brown one at the other end of the room.

"I don't believe it," she said.

"No? But haven't I the right to be what is now accepted as human? Should I pay for everybody's mistakes and never be permitted one of my own?"

"That's not like you."

"No?" He stretched himself full-length on the carpet, lazily, relaxing. "Did you intend me to notice that if you think I did it on purpose, then you still give me credit for having a purpose? You're still unable to accept me as a bum?"

She closed her eyes. She heard him laughing; it was the gayest sound in the world. She opened her eyes hastily; but there was no hint of cruelty in his face, only pure laughter.

"My motive, Dagny? You don't think that it's the simplest one of all—the spur of the moment?"

No, she thought, no, that's not true; not if he laughed like that, not if he looked as he did. The capacity for unclouded enjoyment, she thought, does not belong to irresponsible fools; an inviolate peace of spirit is not the achievement of a drifter; to be able to laugh like that is the end result of the most profound, most solemn thinking.

Almost dispassionately, looking at his figure stretched on the carpet at her feet, she observed what memory it brought back to her: the black pajamas stressed the long lines of his body, the open collar showed a smooth, young, sunburned skin—and she thought of the figure in black slacks and shirt stretched

beside her on the grass at sunrise. She had felt pride then, the pride of knowing that she owned his body; she still felt it. She remembered suddenly, specifically, the excessive acts of their intimacy; the memory should have been offensive to her now, but wasn't. It was still pride, without regret or hope, an emotion that had no power to reach her and that she had no power to destroy.

Unaccountably, by an association of feeling that astonished her, she remembered what had conveyed to her recently the same sense of consummate joy as his.

"Francisco," she heard herself saying softly, "we both loved the music of Richard Halley...."

"I still love it."

"Have you ever met him?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Do you happen to know whether he has written a Fifth Concerto?"

He remained perfectly still. She had thought him impervious to shock; he wasn't. But she could not attempt to guess why of all the things she had said, this should be the first to reach him. It was only an instant; then he asked evenly, "What makes you think he has?"

"Well, has he?"

"You know that there are only four Halley Concertos."

"Yes. But I wondered whether he had written another one."

"He has stopped writing."

"I know."

"Then what made you ask that?"

"Just an idle thought. What is he doing now? Where is he?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him for a long time. What made you think that there was a Fifth Concerto?"

"I didn't say there was. I merely wondered about it."

"Why did you think of Richard Halley just now?"

"Because"—she felt her control cracking a little—"because my mind can't make the leap from Richard Halley's music to ... to Mrs. Gilbert Vail."

He laughed, relieved. "Oh, that? ... Incidentally, if you've been following my publicity, have you noticed a funny little discrepancy in the story of Mrs. Gilbert Vail?"

"I don't read the stuff."

"You should. She gave such a beautiful description of last New Year's Eve, which we spent together in my villa in the Andes. The moonlight on the

mountain peaks, and the blood-red flowers hanging on vines in the open windows. See anything wrong in the picture?”

She said quietly, “It’s I who should ask you that, and I’m not going to.”

“Oh, I see nothing wrong—except that last New Year’s Eve I was in El Paso, Texas, presiding at the opening of the San Sebastián Line of Taggart Transcontinental, as you should remember, even if you didn’t choose to be present on the occasion. I had my picture taken with my arms around your brother James and the Señor Orren Boyle.”

She gasped, remembering that this was true, remembering also that she had seen Mrs. Vail’s story in the newspapers.

“Francisco, what ... what does that mean?”

He chuckled. “Draw your own conclusions.... Dagny”—his face was serious—“why did you think of Halley writing a Fifth Concerto? Why not a new symphony or opera? Why specifically a concerto?”

“Why does that disturb you?”

“It doesn’t.” He added softly, “I still love his music, Dagny.” Then he spoke lightly again. “But it belonged to another age. Our age provides a different kind of entertainment.”

He rolled over on his back and lay with his hands crossed under his head, looking up as if he were watching the scenes of a movie farce unrolling on the ceiling.

“Dagny, didn’t you enjoy the spectacle of the behavior of the People’s State of Mexico in regard to the San Sebastián Mines? Did you read their government’s speeches and the editorials in their newspapers? They’re saying that I am an unscrupulous cheat who has defrauded them. They expected to have a successful mining concern to seize. I had no right to disappoint them like that. Did you read about the scabby little bureaucrat who wanted them to sue me?”

He laughed, lying flat on his back; his arms were thrown wide on the carpet, forming a cross with his body; he seemed disarmed, relaxed and young.

“It was worth whatever it’s cost me. I could afford the price of that show. If I had staged it intentionally, I would have beaten the record of the Emperor Nero. What’s burning a city—compared to tearing the lid off hell and letting men see it?”

He raised himself, picked up a few marbles and sat shaking them absently in his hand; they clicked with the soft, clear sound of good stone. She realized suddenly that playing with those marbles was not a deliberate affectation on his part; it was restlessness; he could not remain inactive for long.

“The government of the People’s State of Mexico has issued a proclamation,” he said, “asking the people to be patient and put up with hardships just a little longer. It seems that the copper fortune of the San Sebastián Mines was part of the plans of the central planning council. It was to raise everybody’s standard of living and provide a roast of pork every Sunday for every man, woman, child and abortion in the People’s State of Mexico. Now the planners are asking their people not to blame the government, but to blame the depravity of the rich, because I turned out to be an irresponsible playboy, instead of the greedy capitalist I was expected to be. How were they to know, they’re asking, that I would let them down? Well, true enough. How were they to know it?”

She noticed the way he fingered the marbles in his hand. He was not conscious of it, he was looking off into some grim distance, but she felt certain that the action was a relief to him, perhaps as a contrast. His fingers were moving slowly, feeling the texture of the stones with sensual enjoyment. Instead of finding it crude, she found it strangely attractive—as if, she thought suddenly, as if sensuality were not physical at all, but came from a fine discrimination of the spirit.

“And that’s not all they didn’t know,” he said. “They’re in for some more knowledge. There’s that housing settlement for the workers of San Sebastián. It cost eight million dollars. Steel-frame houses, with plumbing, electricity and refrigeration. Also a school, a church, a hospital and a movie theater. A settlement built for people who had lived in hovels made of driftwood and stray tin cans. My reward for building it was to be the privilege of escaping with my skin, a special concession due to the accident of my not being a native of the People’s State of Mexico. That workers’ settlement was also part of their plans. A model example of progressive State housing. Well, those steel-frame houses are mainly cardboard, with a coating of good imitation shellac. They won’t stand another year. The plumbing pipes—as well as most of our mining equipment—were purchased from the dealers whose main source of supply are the city dumps of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. I’d give those pipes another five months, and the electric system about six. The wonderful roads we graded up four thousand feet of rock for the People’s State of Mexico, will not last beyond a couple of winters: they’re cheap cement without foundation, and the bracing at the bad turns is just painted clapboard. Wait for one good mountain slide. The church, I think, will stand. They’ll need it.”

“Francisco,” she whispered, “did you do it on purpose?”

He raised his head; she was startled to see that his face had a look of infinite

weariness. "Whether I did it on purpose," he said, "or through neglect, or through stupidity, don't you understand that that doesn't make any difference? The same element was missing."

She was trembling. Against all her decisions and control, she cried, "Francisco! If you see what's happening in the world, if you understand all the things you said, you can't laugh about it! You, of all men, you should fight them!"

"Whom?"

"The looters, and those who make world-looting possible. The Mexican planners and their kind."

His smile had a dangerous edge. "No, my dear. It's you that I have to fight."

She looked at him blankly. "What are you trying to say?"

"I am saying that the workers' settlement of San Sebastián cost eight million dollars," he answered with slow emphasis, his voice hard. "The price paid for those cardboard houses was the price that could have bought steel structures. So was the price paid for every other item. That money went to men who grow rich by such methods. Such men do not remain rich for long. The money will go into channels which will carry it, not to the most productive, but to the most corrupt. By the standards of our time, the man who has the least to offer is the man who wins. That money will vanish in projects such as the San Sebastián Mines."

She asked with effort, "Is that what you're after?"

"Yes."

"Is that what you find amusing?"

"Yes."

"I am thinking of your name," she said, while another part of her mind was crying to her that reproaches were useless. "It was a tradition of your family that a d'Anconia always left a fortune greater than the one he received."

"Oh yes, my ancestors had a remarkable ability for doing the right thing at the right time—and for making the right investments. Of course, 'investment' is a relative term. It depends on what you wish to accomplish. For instance, look at San Sebastián. It cost me fifteen million dollars, but these fifteen million wiped out forty million belonging to Taggart Transcontinental, thirty-five million belonging to stockholders such as James Taggart and Orren Boyle, and hundreds of millions which will be lost in secondary consequences. That's not a bad return on an investment, is it, Dagny?"

She was sitting straight. "Do you realize what you're saying?"

"Oh, fully! Shall I beat you to it and name the consequences you were going

to reproach me for? First, I don't think that Taggart Transcontinental will recover from its loss on that preposterous San Sebastián Line. You think it will, but it won't. Second, the San Sebastián helped your brother James to destroy the Phoenix-Durango, which was about the only good railroad left anywhere."

"You realize all that?"

"And a great deal more."

"Do you"—she did not know why she had to say it, except that the memory of the face with the dark, violent eyes seemed to stare at her—"do you know Ellis Wyatt?"

"Sure."

"Do you know what this might do to him?"

"Yes. He's the one who's going to be wiped out next."

"Do you ... find that ... amusing?"

"Much more amusing than the ruin of the Mexican planners."

She stood up. She had called him corrupt for years; she had feared it, she had thought about it, she had tried to forget it and never think of it again; but she had never suspected how far the corruption had gone.

She was not looking at him; she did not know that she was saying it aloud, quoting his words of the past: "... who'll do greater honor, you—to Nat Taggart, or I—to Sebastián d'Anconia ..."

"But didn't you realize that I named those mines in honor of my great ancestor? I think it was a tribute which he would have liked."

It took her a moment to recover her eyesight; she had never known what was meant by blasphemy or what one felt on encountering it; she knew it now.

He had risen and stood courteously, smiling down at her; it was a cold smile, impersonal and unrevealing.

She was trembling, but it did not matter. She did not care what he saw or guessed or laughed at.

"I came here because I wanted to know the reason for what you've done with your life," she said tonelessly, without anger.

"I have told you the reason," he answered gravely, "but you don't want to believe it."

"I kept seeing you as you were. I couldn't forget it. And that you should have become what you are—*that* does not belong in a rational universe."

"No? And the world as you see it around you, does?"

"You were not the kind of man who gets broken by any kind of world."

"True."

“Then—why?”

He shrugged. “Who is John Galt?”

“Oh, don’t use gutter language!”

He glanced at her. His lips held the hint of a smile, but his eyes were still, earnest and, for an instant, disturbingly perceptive.

“Why?” she repeated.

He answered, as he had answered in the night, in this hotel, ten years ago, “You’re not ready to hear it.”

He did not follow her to the door. She had put her hand on the doorknob when she turned—and stopped. He stood across the room, looking at her; it was a glance directed at her whole person; she knew its meaning and it held her motionless.

“I still want to sleep with you,” he said. “But I am not a man who is happy enough to do it.”

“Not happy enough?” she repeated in complete bewilderment.

He laughed. “Is it proper that that should be the first thing you’d answer?” He waited, but she remained silent. “You want it, too, don’t you?”

She was about to answer “No,” but realized that the truth was worse than that. “Yes,” she answered coldly, “but it doesn’t matter to me that I want it.”

He smiled, in open appreciation, acknowledging the strength she had needed to say it.

But he was not smiling when he said, as she opened the door to leave, “You have a great deal of courage, Dagny. Some day, you’ll have enough of it.”

“Of what? Courage?”

But he did not answer.

CHAPTER X

WYATT'S TORCH

“God have mercy on us, ma’am!” said the clerk of the Hall of Records. “Nobody knows who owns that factory now. I guess nobody will ever know it.”

The clerk sat at a desk in a ground-floor office, where dust lay undisturbed on the files and few visitors ever called. He looked at the shining automobile parked outside his window, in the muddy square that had once been the center of a prosperous county seat; he looked with a faint, wistful wonder at his two unknown visitors.

“Why?” asked Dagny.

He pointed helplessly at the mass of papers he had taken out of the files. “The court will have to decide who owns it, which I don’t think any court can do. If a court ever gets to it. I don’t think it will.”

“Why? What happened?”

“Well, it was sold out—the Twentieth Century, I mean. The Twentieth Century Motor Company. It was sold twice, at the same time and to two different sets of owners. That was sort of a big scandal at the time, two years ago, and now it’s just”—he pointed—“just a bunch of paper lying around, waiting for a court hearing. I don’t see how any judge will be able to untangle any property rights out of it—or any right at all.”

“Would you tell me please just what happened?”

“Well, the last legal owner of the factory was The People’s Mortgage Company, of Rome, Wisconsin. That’s the town the other side of the factory, thirty miles north. That Mortgage Company was a sort of noisy outfit that did a lot of advertising about easy credit. Mark Yonts was the head of it. Nobody knew where he came from and nobody knows where he’s gone to now, but what they discovered, the morning after The People’s Mortgage Company collapsed, was that Mark Yonts had sold the Twentieth Century Motor factory to a bunch of suckers from South Dakota, and that he’d also given it as collateral for a loan from a bank in Illinois. And when they took a look at the factory, they discovered that he’d moved all the machinery out and sold it piecemeal, God only knows where and to whom. So it seems like everybody owns the place—

and nobody. That's how it stands now—the South Dakotans and the bank and the attorney for the creditors of The People's Mortgage Company all suing one another, all claiming this factory, and nobody having the right to move a wheel in it, except that there's no wheels left to move."

"Did Mark Yonts operate the factory before he sold it?"

"Lord, no, ma'am! He wasn't the kind that ever operates anything. He didn't want to *make* money, only to *get* it. Guess he got it, too—more than anyone could have made out of that factory."

He wondered why the blond, hard-faced man, who sat with the woman in front of his desk, looked grimly out the window at their car, at a large object wrapped in canvas, roped tightly under the raised cover of the car's luggage compartment.

"What happened to the factory records?"

"Which do you mean, ma'am?"

"Their production records. Their work records. Their... personnel files."

"Oh, there's nothing left of that now. There's been a lot of looting going on. All the mixed owners grabbed what furniture or things they could haul out of there, even if the sheriff did put a padlock on the door. The papers and stuff like that—I guess it was all taken by the scavengers from Starnesville, that's the place down in the valley, where they're having it pretty tough these days. They burned the stuff for kindling, most likely."

"Is there anyone left here who used to work in the factory?" asked Rearden.

"No, sir. Not around here. They all lived down in Starnesville."

"All of them?" whispered Dagny; she was thinking of the ruins. "The ... engineers, too?"

"Yes, ma'am. That was the factory town. They've all gone, long ago."

"Do you happen to remember the names of any men who worked there?"

"No, ma'am."

"What owner was the last to operate the factory?" asked Rearden.

"I couldn't say, sir. There's been so much trouble up there and the place has changed hands so many times, since old Jed Starnes died. He's the man who built the factory. He made this whole part of the country, I guess. He died twelve years ago."

"Can you give us the names of all the owners since?"

"No, sir. We had a fire in the old courthouse, about three years ago, and all the old records are gone. I don't know where you could trace them now."

"You don't know how this Mark Yonts happened to acquire the factory?"

“Yes, I know that. He bought it from Mayor Bascom of Rome. How Mayor Bascom happened to own it, I don’t know.”

“Where is Mayor Bascom now?”

“Still there, in Rome.”

“Thank you very much,” said Rearden, rising. “We’ll call on him.”

They were at the door when the clerk asked, “What is it you’re looking for, sir?”

“We’re looking for a friend of ours,” said Rearden. “A friend we’ve lost, who used to work in that factory.”



Mayor Bascom of Rome, Wisconsin, leaned back in his chair; his chest and stomach formed a pear-shaped outline under his soiled shirt. The air was a mixture of sun and dust, pressing heavily upon the porch of his house. He waved his arm, the ring on his finger flashing a large topaz of poor quality.

“No use, no use, lady, absolutely no use,” he said. “Would be just a waste of your time, trying to question the folks around here. There’s no factory people left, and nobody that would remember much about them. So many families have moved away that what’s left here is plain no good, if I do say so myself, plain no good, just being Mayor of a bunch of trash.”

He had offered chairs to his two visitors, but he did not mind it if the lady preferred to stand at the porch railing. He leaned back, studying her long-lined figure; high-class merchandise, he thought; but then, the man with her was obviously rich.

Dagny stood looking at the streets of Rome. There were houses, sidewalks, lampposts, even a sign advertising soft drinks; but they looked as if it were now only a matter of inches and hours before the town would reach the stage of Starnesville.

“Naw, there’s no factory records left,” said Mayor Bascom. “If that’s what you want to find, lady, give it up. It’s like chasing leaves in a storm now. Just like leaves in a storm. Who cares about papers? At a time like this, what people save is good, solid, material objects. One’s got to be practical.”

Through the dusty windowpanes, they could see the living room of his house: there were Persian rugs on a buckled wooden floor, a portable bar with

chromium strips against a wall stained by the seepage of last year's rains, an expensive radio with an old kerosene lamp placed on top of it.

"Sure, it's me that sold the factory to Mark Yonts. Mark was a nice fellow, a nice, lively, energetic fellow. Sure, he did trim a few corners, but who doesn't? Of course, he went a bit too far. That, I didn't expect. I thought he was smart enough to stay within the law—whatever's left of it nowadays."

Mayor Bascom smiled, looking at them in a manner of placid frankness. His eyes were shrewd without intelligence, his smile good-natured without kindness.

"I don't think you folks are detectives," he said, "but even if you were, it wouldn't matter to me. I didn't get any rake-off from Mark, he didn't let me in on any of his deals, I haven't any idea where he's gone to now." He sighed. "I liked that fellow. Wish he'd stayed around. Never mind the Sunday sermons. He had to live, didn't he? He was no worse than anybody, only smarter. Some get caught at it and some don't—that's the only difference.... Nope, I didn't know what he was going to do with it, when he bought that factory. Sure, he paid me quite a bit more than the old booby trap was worth. Sure, he was doing me a favor when he bought it. Nope, I didn't put any pressure on him to make him buy it. Wasn't necessary. I'd done him a few favors before. There's plenty of laws that's sort of made of rubber, and a mayor's in a position to stretch them a bit for a friend. Well, what the hell? That's the only way anybody ever gets rich in this world"—he glanced at the luxurious black car—"as you ought to know."

"You were telling us about the factory," said Rearden, trying to control himself.

"What I can't stand," said Mayor Bascom, "is people who talk about principles. No principle ever filled anybody's milk bottle. The only thing that counts in life is solid, material assets. It's no time for theories, when everything is falling to pieces around us. Well, me—I don't aim to go under. Let them keep their ideas and I'll take the factory. I don't want ideas, I just want my three square meals a day."

"Why did you buy that factory?"

"Why does anybody buy any business? To squeeze whatever can be squeezed out of it. I know a good chance when I see it. It was a bankruptcy sale and nobody much who'd want to bid on the old mess. So I got the place for peanuts. Didn't have to hold it long, either—Mark took it off my hands in two-three months. Sure, it was a smart deal, if I say so myself. No big business tycoon could have done any better with it."

"Was the factory operating when you took it over?"

“Naw. It was shut down.”

“Did you attempt to reopen it?”

“Not me. I’m a practical person.”

“Can you recall the names of any men who worked there?”

“No. Never met ‘em.”

“Did you move anything out of the factory?”

“Well, I’ll tell you. I took a look around—and what I liked was old Jed’s desk. Old Jed Starnes. He was a real big shot in his time. Wonderful desk, solid mahogany. So I carted it home. And some executive, don’t know who he was, had a stall shower in his bathroom, the like of which I never saw. A glass door with a mermaid cut in the glass, real art work, and hot stuff, too, hotter than any oil painting. So I had that shower lifted and moved here. What the hell, I owned it, didn’t I? I was entitled to get something valuable out of that factory.”

“Whose bankruptcy sale was it, when you bought the factory?”

“Oh, that was the big crash of the Community National Bank in Madison. Boy, was that a crash! It just about finished the whole state of Wisconsin—sure finished this part of it. Some say it was this motor factory that broke the bank, but others say it was only the last drop in a leaking bucket, because the Community National had bum investments all over three or four states. Eugene Lawson was the head of it. The banker with a heart, they called him. He was quite famous in these parts two-three years ago.”

“Did Lawson operate the factory?”

“No. He merely lent an awful lot of money on it, more than he could ever hope to get back out of the old dump. When the factory busted, that was the last straw for Gene Lawson. The bank busted three months later.” He sighed. “It hit the folks pretty hard around here. They all had their life savings in the Community National.”

Mayor Bascom looked regretfully past his porch railing at his town. He jerked his thumb at a figure across the street: it was a white-haired charwoman, moving painfully on her knees, scrubbing the steps of a house.

“See that woman, for instance? They used to be solid, respectable folks. Her husband owned the dry-goods store. He worked all his life to provide for her in her old age, and he did, too, by the time he died—only the money was in the Community National Bank.”

“Who operated the factory when it failed?”

“Oh, that was some quicky corporation called Amalgamated Service, Inc. Just a puff-ball. Came up out of nothing and went back to it.”

“Where are its members?”

“Where are the pieces of a puff-ball when it bursts? Try and trace them all over the United States. Try it.”

“Where is Eugene Lawson?”

“Oh, him? He’s done all right. He’s got a job in Washington—in the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources.”

Rearden rose too fast, thrown to his feet by a jolt of anger, then said, controlling himself, “Thank you for the information.”

“You’re welcome, friend, you’re welcome,” said Mayor Bascom placidly. “I don’t know what it is you’re after, but take my word for it, give it up. There’s nothing more to be had out of that factory.”

“I told you that we are looking for a friend of ours.”

“Well, have it your way. Must be a pretty good friend, if you’ll go to so much trouble to find him, you and the charming lady who is not your wife.”

Dagny saw Rearden’s face go white, so that even his lips became a sculptured feature, indistinguishable against his skin. “Keep your dirty —he began, but she stepped between them.

“Why do you think that I am not his wife?” she asked calmly.

Mayor Bascom looked astonished by Rearden’s reaction; he had made the remark without malice, merely like a fellow cheat displaying his shrewdness to his partners in guilt.

“Lady, I’ve seen a lot in my lifetime,” he said good-naturedly. “Married people don’t look as if they have a bedroom on their minds when they look at each other. In this world, either you’re virtuous or you enjoy yourself. Not both, lady, not both.”

“I’ve asked him a question,” she said to Rearden in time to silence him. “He’s given me an instructive explanation.”

“If you want a tip, lady,” said Mayor Bascom, “get yourself a wedding ring from the dime store and wear it. It’s not sure fire, but it helps.”

“Thank you,” she said. “Good-bye.”

The stern, stressed calm of her manner was a command that made Rearden follow her back to their car in silence.

They were miles beyond the town when he said, not looking at her, his voice desperate and low, “Dagny, Dagny, Dagny ... I’m sorry!”

“I’m not.”

Moments later, when she saw the look of control returning to his face, she said, “Don’t ever get angry at a man for stating the truth.”

“That particular truth was none of his business.”

“His particular estimate of it was none of your concern or mine.”

He said through his teeth, not as an answer, but as if the single thought battering his brain turned into sounds against his will, “I couldn’t protect you from that unspeakable little—”

“I didn’t need protection.”

He remained silent, not looking at her.

“Hank, when you’re able to keep down the anger, tomorrow or next week, give some thought to that man’s explanation and see if you recognize any part of it.”

He jerked his head to glance at her, but said nothing.

When he spoke, a long time later, it was only to say in a tired, even voice, “We can’t call New York and have our engineers come here to search the factory. We can’t meet them here. We can’t let it be known that we found the motor together.... I had forgotten all that... up there ... in the laboratory.”

“Let me call Eddie, when we find a telephone. I’ll have him send two engineers from the Taggart staff. I’m here alone, on my vacation, for all they’ll know or have to know.”

They drove two hundred miles before they found a long-distance telephone line. When she called Eddie Willers, he gasped, hearing her voice.

“Dagny! For God’s sake, where are you?”

“In Wisconsin. Why?”

“I didn’t know where to reach you. You’d better come back at once. As fast as you can.”

“What happened?”

“Nothing—yet. But there are things going on, which ... You’d better stop them now, if you can. If anybody can.”

“What things?”

“Haven’t you been reading the newspapers?”

“No.”

“I can’t tell you over the phone. I can’t give you all the details. Dagny, you’ll think I’m insane, but I think they’re planning to kill Colorado.”

“I’ll come back at once,” she said.

* * *

Cut into the granite of Manhattan, under the Taggart Terminal, there were tunnels which had once been used as sidings, at a time when traffic ran in clicking currents through every artery of the Terminal every hour of the day. The need for space had shrunk through the years, with the shrinking of the traffic, and the side tunnels had been abandoned, like dry river beds; a few lights remained as blue patches on the granite over rails left to rust on the ground.

Dagny placed the remnant of the motor into a vault in one of the tunnels; the vault had once contained an emergency electric generator, which had been removed long ago. She did not trust the useless young men of the Taggart research staff; there were only two engineers of talent among them, who could appreciate her discovery. She had shared her secret with the two and sent them to search the factory in Wisconsin. Then she had hidden the motor where no one else would know of its existence.

When her workers carried the motor down to the vault and departed, she was about to follow them and lock the steel door, but she stopped, key in hand, as if the silence and solitude had suddenly thrown her at the problem she had been facing for days, as if this were the moment to make her decision.

Her office car was waiting for her at one of the Terminal platforms, attached to the end of a train due to leave for Washington in a few minutes. She had made an appointment to see Eugene Lawson, but she had told herself that she would cancel it and postpone her quest—if she could think of some action to take against the things she had found on her return to New York, the things Eddie begged her to fight.

She had tried to think, but she could see no way of fighting, no rules of battle, no weapons. Helplessness was a strange experience, new to her; she had never found it hard to face things and make decisions; but she was not dealing with things—this was a fog without shapes or definitions, in which something kept forming and shifting before it could be seen, like semi-clots in a not-quite-liquid—it was as if her eyes were reduced to side-vision and she were sensing blurs of disaster coiling toward her, but she could not move her glance, she had no glance to move and focus.

The Union of Locomotive Engineers was demanding that the maximum speed of all trains on the John Galt Line be reduced to sixty miles an hour. The Union of Railway Conductors and Brakemen was demanding that the length of all freight trains on the John Galt Line be reduced to sixty cars.

The states of Wyoming, New Mexico, Utah and Arizona were demanding that the number of trains run in Colorado not exceed the number of trains run in each

of these neighboring states.

A group headed by Orren Boyle was demanding the passage of a Preservation of Livelihood Law, which would limit the production of Rearden Metal to an amount equal to the output of any other steel mill of equal plant capacity.

A group headed by Mr. Mowen was demanding the passage of a Fair Share Law to give every customer who wanted it an equal supply of Rearden Metal.

A group headed by Bertram Scudder was demanding the passage of a Public Stability Law, forbidding Eastern business firms to move out of their states.

Wesley Mouch, Top Co-ordinator of the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources, was issuing a great many statements, the content and purpose of which could not be defined, except that the words “emergency powers” and “unbalanced economy” kept appearing in the text every few lines.

“Dagny, by what right?” Eddie Willers had asked her, his voice quiet, but the words sounding like a cry. “By what right are they all doing it? By what right?”

She had confronted James Taggart in his office and said, “Jim, this is your battle. I’ve fought mine. You’re supposed to be an expert at dealing with the looters. Stop them.”

Taggart had said, not looking at her, “You can’t expect to run the national economy to suit your own convenience.”

“I don’t want to run the national economy! I want your national economy runners to leave me alone! I have a railroad to run—and I know what’s going to happen to your national economy if my railroad collapses!”

“I see no necessity for panic.”

“Jim, do I have to explain to you that the income from our Rio Norte Line is all we’ve got, to save us from collapsing? That we need every penny of it, every fare, every carload of freight—as fast as we can get it?” He had not answered. “When we have to use every bit of power in every one of our broken-down Diesels, when we don’t have enough of them to give Colorado the service it needs—what’s going to happen if we reduce the speed and the length of trains?”

“Well, there’s something to be said for the unions’ viewpoint, too. With so many railroads closing and so many railroad men out of work, they feel that those extra speeds you’ve established on the Rio Norte Line are unfair—they feel that there should be more trains, instead, so that the work would be divided around—they feel that it’s not fair for us to get all the benefit of that new rail, they want a share of it, too.”

“Who wants a share of it? In payment for what?” He had not answered. “Who’ll bear the cost of two trains doing the work of one?” He had not

answered. "Where are you going to get the cars and the engines?" He had not answered. "What are those men going to do after they've put Taggart Transcontinental out of existence?"

"I fully intend to protect the interests of Taggart Transcontinental."

"How?" He had not answered. "How—if you kill Colorado?"

"It seems to me that before we worry about giving some people a chance to expand, we ought to give some consideration to the people who need a chance of bare survival."

"If you kill Colorado, what is there going to be left for your damn looters to survive on?"

"You have always been opposed to every progressive social measure. I seem to remember that you predicted disaster when we passed the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule—but the disaster has not come."

"Because *I* saved you, you rotten fools! I won't be able to save you this time!" He had shrugged, not looking at her. "And if I don't, who will?" He had not answered.

It did not seem real to her, here, under the ground. Thinking of it here, she knew she could have no part in Jim's battle. There was no action she could take against the men of undefined thought, of unnamed motives, of unstated purposes, of unspecified morality. There was nothing she could say to them—nothing would be heard or answered. What were the weapons, she thought, in a realm where reason was not a weapon any longer? It was a realm she could not enter. She had to leave it to Jim and count on his self-interest. Dimly, she felt the chill of a thought telling her that self-interest was not Jim's motive.

She looked at the object before her, a glass case containing the remnant of the motor. The man who made the motor—she thought suddenly, the thought coming like a cry of despair. She felt a moment's helpless longing to find him, to lean against him and let him tell her what to do. A mind like his would know the way to win this battle.

She looked around her. In the clean, rational world of the underground tunnels, nothing was of so urgent an importance as the task of finding the man who made the motor. She thought: Could she delay it in order to argue with Orren Boyle?—to reason with Mr. Mowen?—to plead with Bertram Scudder? She saw the motor, completed, built into an engine that pulled a train of two hundred cars down a track of Rearden Metal at two hundred miles an hour. When the vision was within her reach, within the possible, was she to give it up and spend her time bargaining about sixty miles and sixty cars? She could not

descend to an existence where her brain would explode under the pressure of forcing itself not to outdistance incompetence. She could not function to the rule of: Pipe down—keep down—slow down—don't do your best, it is not wanted!

She turned resolutely and left the vault, to take the train for Washington.

It seemed to her, as she locked the steel door, that she heard a faint echo of steps. She glanced up and down the dark curve of the tunnel. There was no one in sight; there was nothing but a string of blue lights glistening on walls of damp granite.



Rearden could not fight the gangs who demanded the laws. The choice was to fight them or to keep his mills open. He had lost his supply of iron ore. He had to fight one battle or the other. There was no time for both.

He had found, on his return, that a scheduled shipment of ore had not been delivered. No word or explanation had been heard from Larkin. When summoned to Rearden's office, Larkin appeared three days later than the appointment made, offering no apology. He said, not looking at Rearden, his mouth drawn tightly into an expression of tancorous dignity:

"After all, you can't order people to come running to your office any time you please."

Rearden spoke slowly and carefully. "Why wasn't the ore delivered?"

"I won't take abuse, I simply won't take any abuse for something I couldn't help. I can run a mine just as well as you ran it, every bit as well, I did everything you did—I don't know why something keeps going wrong unexpectedly all the time. I can't be blamed for the unexpected."

"To whom did you ship your ore last month?"

"I intended to ship you your share of it, I fully intended it, but I couldn't help it if we lost ten days of production last month on account of the rainstorm in the whole of north Minnesota—I intended to ship you the ore, so you can't blame me, because my intention was completely honest."

"If one of my blast furnaces goes down, will I be able to keep it going by feeding your intention into it?"

"That's why nobody can deal with you or talk to you—because you're inhuman."

"I have just learned that for the last three months, you have not been shipping

your ore by the lake boats, you have been shipping it by rail. Why?"

"Well, after all, I have a right to run my business as I see fit."

"Why are you willing to pay the extra cost?"

"What do you care? I'm not charging it to you."

"What will you do when you find that you can't afford the rail rates and that you have destroyed the lake shipping?"

"I am sure you wouldn't understand any consideration other than dollars and cents, but some people do consider their social and patriotic responsibilities."

"What responsibilities?"

"Well, I think that a railroad like Taggart Transcontinental is essential to the national welfare and it is one's public duty to support Jim's Minnesota branch line, which is running at a deficit."

Rearden leaned forward across the desk; he was beginning to see the links of a sequence he had never understood. "To whom did you ship your ore last month?" he asked evenly.

"Well, after all, that is my private business which—"

"To Orren Boyle, wasn't it?"

"You can't expect people to sacrifice the entire steel industry of the nation to your selfish interests and—"

"Get out of here," said Rearden. He said it calmly. The sequence was clear to him now.

"Don't misunderstand me, I didn't mean—"

"Get out."

Larkin got out.

Then there followed the days and nights of searching a continent by phone, by wire, by plane—of looking at abandoned mines and at mines ready to be abandoned—of tense, rushed conferences held at tables in the unlighted corners of disreputable restaurants. Looking across the table, Rearden had to decide how much he could risk to invest upon the sole evidence of a man's face, manner and tone of voice, hating the state of having to hope for honesty as for a favor, but risking it, pouring money into unknown hands in exchange for unsupported promises, into unsigned, unrecorded loans to dummy owners of failing mines—money handed and taken furtively, as an exchange between criminals, in anonymous cash; money poured into unenforceable contracts—both parties knowing that in case of fraud, the defrauded was to be punished, not the defrauder—but poured that a stream of ore might continue flowing into furnaces, that the furnaces might continue to pour a stream of white metal.

“Mr. Rearden,” asked the purchasing manager of his mills, “if you keep that up, where will be your profit?”

“We’ll make it up on tonnage,” said Rearden wearily. “We have an unlimited market for Rearden Metal.”

The purchasing manager was an elderly man with graying hair, a lean, dry face, and a heart which, people said, was given exclusively to the task of squeezing every last ounce of value out of a penny. He stood in front of Rearden’s desk, saying nothing else, merely looking straight at Rearden, his cold eyes narrowed and grim. It was a look of the most profound sympathy that Rearden had ever seen.

There’s no other course open, thought Rearden, as he had thought through days and nights. He knew no weapons but to pay for what he wanted, to give value for value, to ask nothing of nature without trading his effort in return, to ask nothing of men without trading the product of his effort. What were the weapons, he thought, if values were not a weapon any longer?

“An unlimited market, Mr. Rearden?” the purchasing manager asked dryly.

Rearden glanced up at him. “I guess I’m not smart enough to make the sort of deals needed nowadays,” he said, in answer to the unspoken thoughts that hung across his desk.

The purchasing manager shook his head. “No, Mr. Rearden, it’s one or the other. The same kind of brain can’t do both. Either you’re good at running the mills or you’re good at running to Washington.”

“Maybe I ought to learn their method.”

“You couldn’t learn it and it wouldn’t do you any good. You wouldn’t win in any of those deals. Don’t you understand? You’re the one who’s got something to be looted.”

When he was left alone, Rearden felt a jolt of blinding anger, as it had come to him before, painful, single and sudden like an electric shock—the anger bursting out of the knowledge that one cannot deal with pure evil, with the naked, full-conscious evil that neither has nor seeks justification. But when he felt the wish to fight and kill in the rightful cause of self-defense—he saw the fat, grinning face of Mayor Bascom and heard the drawling voice saying, “... you and the charming lady who is not your wife.”

Then no rightful cause was left, and the pain of anger was turning into the shameful pain of submission. He had no right to condemn anyone—he thought—to denounce anything, to fight and die joyously, claiming the sanction of virtue. The broken promises, the unconfessed desires, the betrayal, the deceit, the

lies, the fraud—he was guilty of them all. What form of corruption could he scorn? Degrees do not matter, he thought; one does not bargain about inches of evil.

He did not know—as he sat slumped at his desk, thinking of the honesty he could claim no longer, of the sense of justice he had lost—that it was his rigid honesty and ruthless sense of justice that were now knocking his only weapon out of his hands. He would fight the looters, but the wrath and fire were gone. He would fight, but only as one guilty wretch against the others. He did not pronounce the words, but the pain was their equivalent, the ugly pain saying: Who am I to cast the first stone?

He let his body fall across the desk.... Dagny, he thought, Dagny, if this is the price I have to pay, I'll pay it.... He was still the trader who knew no code except that of full payment for his desires.

It was late when he came home and hurried soundlessly up the stairs to his bedroom. He hated himself for being reduced to sneaking, but he had done it on most of his evenings for months. The sight of his family had become unbearable to him; he could not tell why. Don't hate them for your own guilt, he had told himself, but knew dimly that this was not the root of his hatred.

He closed the door of his bedroom like a fugitive winning a moment's reprieve. He moved cautiously, undressing for bed: he wanted no sound to betray his presence to his family, he wanted no contact with them, not even in their own minds.

He had put on his pajamas and stopped to light a cigarette, when the door of his bedroom opened. The only person who could properly enter his room without knocking had never volunteered to enter it, so he stared blankly for a moment before he was able to believe that it was Lillian who came in.

She wore an Empire garment of pale chartreuse, its pleated skirt streaming gracefully from its high waistline; one could not tell at first glance whether it was an evening gown or a negligee; it was a negligee. She paused in the doorway, the lines of her body flowing into an attractive silhouette against the light.

"I know I shouldn't introduce myself to a stranger," she said softly, "but I'll have to: my name is Mrs. Rearden." He could not tell whether it was sarcasm or a plea.

She entered and threw the door closed with a casual, imperious gesture, the gesture of an owner.

"What is it, Lillian?" he asked quietly.

“My dear, you mustn’t confess so much so bluntly”—she moved in a leisurely manner across the room, past his bed, and sat down in an armchair—“and so unflatteringly. It’s an admission that I need to show special cause for taking your time. Should I make an appointment through your secretary?”

He stood in the middle of the room, holding the cigarette at his lips, looking at her, volunteering no answer.

She laughed. “My reason is so unusual that I know it will never occur to you: loneliness, darling. Do you mind throwing a few crumbs of your expensive attention to a beggar? Do you mind if I stay here without any formal reason at all?”

“No,” he said quietly, “not if you wish to.”

“I have nothing weighty to discuss—no million-dollar orders, no transcontinental deals, no rails, no bridges. Not even the political situation. I just want to chatter like a woman about perfectly unimportant things.”

“Go ahead.”

“Henry, there’s no better way to stop me, is there?” She had an air of helpless, appealing sincerity. “What can I say after that? Suppose I wanted to tell you about the new novel which Ralph Eubank is writing—he is dedicating it to me—would that interest you?”

“If it’s the truth that you want—not in the least.”

She laughed. “And if it’s not the truth that I want?”

“Then I wouldn’t know what to say,” he answered—and felt a rush of blood to his brain, tight as a slap, realizing suddenly the double infamy of a lie uttered in protestation of honesty; he had said it sincerely, but it implied a boast to which he had no right any longer. “Why would you want it, if it’s not the truth?” he asked. “What for?”

“Now you see, *that’s* the cruelty of conscientious people. You wouldn’t understand it—would you?—if I answered that real devotion consists of being willing to lie, cheat and fake in order to make another person happy—to create for him the reality he wants, if he doesn’t like the one that exists.”

“No,” he said slowly, “I wouldn’t understand it.”

“It’s really very simple. If you tell a beautiful woman that she is beautiful, what have you given her? It’s no more than a fact and it has cost you nothing. But if you tell an ugly woman that she is beautiful, you offer her the great homage of corrupting the concept of beauty. To love a woman for her virtues is meaningless. She’s earned it, it’s a payment, not a gift. But to love her for her vices is a real gift, unearned and undeserved. To love her for her vices is to

defile all virtue for her sake—and *that* is a real tribute of love, because you sacrifice your conscience, your reason, your integrity and your invaluable self-esteem.”

He looked at her blankly. It sounded like some sort of monstrous corruption that precluded the possibility of wondering whether anyone could mean it; he wondered only what was the point of uttering it.

“What’s love, darling, if it’s not self-sacrifice?” she went on lightly, in the tone of a drawing-room discussion. “What’s self-sacrifice, unless one sacrifices that which is one’s most precious and most important? But I don’t expect you to understand it. Not a stainless-steel Puritan like you. That’s the immense selfishness of the Puritan. You’d let the whole world perish rather than soil that immaculate self of yours with a single spot of which you’d have to be ashamed.”

He said slowly, his voice oddly strained and solemn, “I have never claimed to be immaculate.”

She laughed. “And what is it you’re being right now? You’re giving me an honest answer, aren’t you?” She shrugged her naked shoulders. “Oh, darling, don’t take me seriously! I’m just talking.”

He ground his cigarette into an ashtray; he did not answer.

“Darling,” she said, “I actually came here only because I kept thinking that I had a husband and I wanted to find out what he looked like.”

She studied him as he stood across the room, the tall, straight, taut lines of his body emphasized by the single color of the dark blue pajamas.

“You’re very attractive,” she said. “You look so much better—these last few months. Younger. Should I say happier? You look less tense. Oh, I know you’re rushed more than ever and you act like a commander in an air raid, but that’s only the surface. You’re less tense—inside.”

He looked at her, astonished. It was true; he had not known it, had not admitted it to himself. He wondered at her power of observation. She had seen little of him in these last few months. He had not entered her bedroom since his return from Colorado. He had thought that she would welcome their isolation from each other. Now he wondered what motive could have made her so sensitive to a change in him—unless it was a feeling much greater than he had ever suspected her of experiencing.

“I was not aware of it,” he said.

“It’s quite becoming, dear—and astonishing, since you’ve been having such a terribly difficult time.”

He wondered whether this was intended as a question. She paused, as if

waiting for an answer, but she did not press it and went on gaily:

“I know you’re having all sorts of trouble at the mills—and then the political situation is getting to be ominous, isn’t it? If they pass those laws they’re talking about, it will hit you pretty hard, won’t it?”

“Yes. It will. But that is a subject which is of no interest to *you*, Lillian, is it?”

“Oh, but it is!” She raised her head and looked straight at him; her eyes had the blank, veiled look he had seen before, a look of deliberate mystery and of confidence in his inability to solve it. “It is of great interest to me ... though not because of any possible financial losses,” she added softly.

He wondered, for the first time, whether her spite, her sarcasm, the cowardly manner of delivering insults under the protection of a smile, were not the opposite of what he had always taken them to be—not a method of torture, but a twisted form of despair, not a desire to make him suffer, but a confession of her own pain, a defense for the pride of an unloved wife, a secret plea—so that the subtle, the hinted, the evasive in her manner, the thing begging to be understood, was not the open malice, but the hidden love. He thought of it, aghast. It made his guilt greater than he had ever contemplated.

“If we’re talking politics, Henry, I had an amusing thought. The side you represent—what is that slogan you all use so much, the motto you’re supposed to stand for? ‘The sanctity of contract’—is that it?”

She saw his swift glance, the intentness of his eyes, the first response of something she had struck, and she laughed aloud.

“Go on,” he said; his voice was low; it had the sound of a threat.

“Darling, what for?—since you understood me quite well.”

“What was it you intended to say?” His voice was harshly precise and without any color of feeling.

“Do you really wish to bring me to the humiliation of complaining? It’s so trite and such a common complaint—although I did think I had a husband who prides himself on being different from lesser men. Do you want me to remind you that you once swore to make my happiness the aim of your life? And that you can’t really say in all honesty whether I’m happy or unhappy, because you haven’t even inquired whether I exist?”

He felt them as a physical pain—all the things that came tearing at him impossibly together. Her words were a plea, he thought—and he felt the dark, hot flow of guilt. He felt pity—the cold ugliness of pity without affection. He felt a dim anger, like a voice he tried to choke, a voice crying in revulsion: Why should I deal with her rotten, twisted lying?—why should I accept torture for the

sake of pity?—why is it I who should have to take the hopeless burden of trying to spare a feeling she won't admit, a feeling I can't know or understand or try to guess? -if she loves me, why doesn't the damn coward say so and let us both face it in the open? He heard another, louder voice, saying evenly: Don't switch the blame to her, that's the oldest trick of all cowards—you're guilty—no matter what she does, it's nothing compared to your guilt—she's right—it makes you sick, doesn't it, to know it's she who's right?—let it make you sick, you damn adulterer—it's she who's right!

"What would make you happy, Lillian?" he asked. His voice was toneless.

She smiled, leaning back in her chair, relaxing; she had been watching his face intently.

"Oh, dear!" she said, as in bored amusement. "That's the shyster question. The loophole. The escape clause."

She got up, letting her arms fall with a shrug, stretching her body in a limp, graceful gesture of helplessness.

"What would make me happy, Henry? That is what *you* ought to tell me. That is what you should have discovered for me. I don't know. You were to create it and offer it to me. That was your trust, your obligation, your responsibility. But you won't be the first man to default on that promise. It's the easiest of all debts to repudiate. Oh, you'd never welsh on a payment for a load of iron ore delivered to you. Only on a life."

She was moving casually across the room, the green-yellow folds of her skirt coiling in long waves about her.

"I know that claims of this kind are impractical," she said. "I have no mortgage on you, no collateral, no guns, no chains. I have no hold on you at all, Henry—nothing but your honor."

He stood looking at her as if it took all of his effort to keep his eyes directed at her face, to keep seeing her, to endure the sight. "What do you want?" he asked.

"Darling, there are so many things you could guess by yourself, if you really wished to know what I want. For instance, if you have been avoiding me so blatantly for months, wouldn't I want to know the reason?"

"I have been very busy."

She shrugged. "A wife expects to be the first concern of her husband's existence. I didn't know that when you swore to forsake all others, it didn't include blast furnaces."

She came closer and, with an amused smile that seemed to mock them both, she slipped her arms around him.

It was the swift, instinctive, ferocious gesture of a young bridegroom at the unrequested contact of a whore—the gesture with which he tore her arms off his body and threw her aside.

He stood, paralyzed, shocked by the brutality of his own reaction. She was staring at him, her face naked in bewilderment, with no mystery, no pretense or protection; whatever calculations she had made, this was a thing she had not expected.

“I’m sorry, Lillian ...” he said, his voice low, a voice of sincerity and of suffering.

She did not answer.

“I’m sorry ... It’s just that I’m very tired,” he added, his voice lifeless; he was broken by the triple lie, one part of which was a disloyalty he could not bear to face; it was not the disloyalty to Lillian.

She gave a brief chuckle. “Well, if that’s the effect your work has on you, I may come to approve of it. Do forgive me, I was merely trying to do my duty. I thought that you were a sensualist who’d never rise above the instincts of an animal in the gutter. I’m not one of those bitches who belong in it.” She was snapping the words dryly, absently, without thinking. Her mind was on a question mark, racing over every possible answer.

It was her last sentence that made him face her suddenly, face her simply, directly, not as one on the defensive any longer. “Lillian, what purpose do you live for?” he asked.

“What a crude question! No enlightened person would ever ask it.”

“Well, what is it that enlightened people do with their lives?”

“Perhaps they do not attempt to do anything. *That* is their enlightenment.”

“What do they do with their time?”

“They certainly don’t spend it on manufacturing plumbing pipes.”

“Tell me, why do you keep making those cracks? I know that you feel contempt for the plumbing pipes. You’ve made that clear long ago. Your contempt means nothing to me. Why keep repeating it?”

He wondered why this hit her; he did not know in what manner, but he knew that it did. He wondered why he felt with absolute certainty that *that* had been the right thing to say.

She asked, her voice dry, “What’s the purpose of the sudden questionnaire?”

He answered simply, “I’d like to know whether there’s anything that you really want. If there is, I’d like to give it to you, if I can.”

“You’d like to *buy* it? That’s all you know—*paying* for things. You get off

easily, don't you? No, it's not as simple as that. What I want is non-material."

"What is it?"

"You."

"How do you mean that, Lillian? You don't mean it in the gutter sense."

"No, not in the gutter sense."

"How, then?"

She was at the door, she turned, she raised her head to look at him and smiled coldly.

"You wouldn't understand it," she said and walked out.

The torture remaining to him was the knowledge that she would never want to leave him and he would never have the right to leave—the thought that he owed her at least the feeble recognition of sympathy, of respect for a feeling he could neither understand nor return—the knowledge that he could summon nothing for her, except contempt, a strange, total, unreasoning contempt, impervious to pity, to reproach, to his own pleas for justice—and, hardest to bear, the proud revulsion against his own verdict, against his demand that he consider himself lower than this woman he despised.

Then it did not matter to him any longer, it all receded into some outer distance, leaving only the thought that he was willing to bear anything—leaving him in a state which was both tension and peace—because he lay in bed, his face pressed to the pillow, thinking of Dagny, of her slender, sensitive body stretched beside him, trembling under the touch of his fingers. He wished she were back in New York. If she were, he would have gone there, now, at once, in the middle of the night.



Eugene Lawson sat at his desk as if it were the control panel of a bomber plane commanding a continent below. But he forgot it, at times, and slouched down, his muscles going slack inside his suit, as if he were pouting at the world. His mouth was the one part of him which he could not pull tight at any time; it was uncomfortably prominent in his lean face, attracting the eyes of any listener: when he spoke, the movement ran through his lower lip, twisting its moist flesh into extraneous contortions of its own.

"I am not ashamed of it," said Eugene Lawson. "Miss Taggart, I want you to know that I am not ashamed of my past career as president of the Community

National Bank of Madison.”

“I haven’t made any reference to shame,” said Dagny coldly.

“No moral guilt can be attached to me, inasmuch as I lost everything I possessed in the crash of that bank. It seems to me that I would have the right to feel proud of such a sacrifice.”

“I merely wanted to ask you some questions about the Twentieth Century Motor Company which—”

“I shall be glad to answer any questions. I have nothing to hide. My conscience is clear. If you thought that the subject was embarrassing to me, you were mistaken.”

“I wanted to inquire about the men who owned the factory at the time when you made a loan to—”

“They were perfectly good men. They were a perfectly sound risk—though, of course, I am speaking in human terms, not in the terms of cold cash, which you are accustomed to expect from bankers. I granted them the loan for the purchase of that factory, because they needed the money. If people needed money, that was enough for me. Need was my standard, Miss Taggart. Need, not greed. My father and grandfather built up the Community National Bank just to amass a fortune for themselves. I placed their fortune in the service of a higher ideal. I did not sit on piles of money and demand collateral from poor people who needed loans. The heart was my collateral. Of course, I do not expect anyone in this materialistic country to understand me. The rewards I got were not of a kind that people of *your* class, Miss Taggart, would appreciate. The people who used to sit in front of my desk at the bank, did not sit as you do, Miss Taggart. They were humble, uncertain, worn with care, afraid to speak. My rewards were the tears of gratitude in their eyes, the trembling voices, the blessings, the woman who kissed my hand when I granted her a loan she had begged for in vain everywhere else.”

“Will you please tell me the names of the men who owned the motor factory?”

“That factory was essential to the region, absolutely essential. I was perfectly justified in granting that loan. It provided employment for thousands of workers who had no other means of livelihood.”

“Did you know any of the people who worked in the factory?”

“Certainly. I knew them all. It was men that interested me, not machines. I was concerned with the human side of industry, not the cash-register side.”

She leaned eagerly across the desk. “Did you know any of the engineers who worked there?”

“The engineers? No, no. I was much more democratic than that. It’s the real workers that interested me. The common men. They all knew me by sight. I used to come into the shops and they would wave and shout, ‘Hello, Gene.’ That’s what they called me—Gene. But I’m sure this is of no interest to you. It’s past history. Now if you really came to Washington in order to talk to me about your railroad”—he straightened up briskly, the bomber-plane pose returning—“I don’t know whether I can promise you any special consideration, inasmuch as I must hold the national welfare above any private privileges or interests which —”

“I didn’t come to talk to you about my railroad,” she said, looking at him in bewilderment. “I have no desire to talk to you about my railroad.”

“No?” He sounded disappointed.

“No. I came for information about the motor factory. Could you possibly recall the names of any of the engineers who worked there?”

“I don’t believe I ever inquired about their names. I wasn’t concerned with the parasites of office and laboratory. I was concerned with the real workers—the men of calloused hands who keep a factory going. They were my friends.”

“Can you give me a few of their names? Any names, of anyone who worked there?”

“My dear Miss Taggart, it was so long ago, there were thousands of them, how can I remember?”

“Can’t you recall one, any one?”

“I certainly cannot. So many people have always filled my life that I can’t be expected to recall individual drops in the ocean.”

“Were you familiar with the production of that factory? With the kind of work they were doing—or planning?”

“Certainly. I took a personal interest in all my investments. I went to inspect that factory very often. They were doing exceedingly well. They were accomplishing wonders. The workers’ housing conditions were the best in the country. I saw lace curtains at every window and flowers on the window sills. Every home had a plot of ground for a garden. They had built a new schoolhouse for the children.”

“Did you know anything about the work of the factory’s research laboratory?”

“Yes, yes, they had a wonderful research laboratory, very advanced, very dynamic, with forward vision and great plans.”

“Do you ... remember hearing anything about... any plans to produce a new type of motor?”

“Motor? What motor, Miss Taggart? I had no time for details. My objective was social progress, universal prosperity, human brotherhood and love. Love, Miss Taggart. That is the key to everything. If men learned to love one another, it would solve all their problems.”

She turned away, not to see the damp movements of his mouth.

A chunk of stone with Egyptian hieroglyphs lay on a pedestal in a corner of the office—the statue of a Hindu goddess with six spider arms stood in a niche—and a huge graph of bewildering mathematical detail, like the sales chart of a mail-order house, hung on the wall.

“Therefore, if you’re thinking of your railroad, Miss Taggart—as, of course, you are, in view of certain possible developments—I must point out to you that although the welfare of the country is my first consideration, to which I would not hesitate to sacrifice anyone’s profits, still, I have never closed my ears to a plea for mercy and—”

She looked at him and understood what it was that he wanted from her, what sort of motive kept him going.

“I don’t wish to discuss my railroad,” she said, fighting to keep her voice monotonously flat, while she wanted to scream in revulsion. “Anything you have to say on the subject, you will please say it to my brother, Mr. James Taggart.”

“I’d think that at a time like this you wouldn’t want to pass up a rare opportunity to plead your case before—”

“Have you preserved any records pertaining to the motor factory?” She sat straight, her hands clasped tight together.

“What records? I believe I told you that I lost everything I owned when the bank collapsed.” His body had gone slack once more, his interest had vanished. “But I do not mind it. What I lost was mere material wealth. I am not the first man in history to suffer for an ideal. I was defeated by the selfish greed of those around me. I couldn’t establish a system of brotherhood and love in just one small state, amidst a nation of profit-seekers and dollar-grubbers. It was not my fault. But I won’t let them beat me. I am not to be stopped. I am fighting—on a wider scale—for the privilege of serving my fellow men. Records, Miss Taggart? The record I left, when I departed from Madison, is inscribed in the hearts of the poor, who had never had a chance before.”

She did not want to utter a single unnecessary word; but she could not stop herself: she kept seeing the figure of the old charwoman scrubbing the steps. “Have you seen that section of the country since?” she asked.

“It’s not my fault!” he yelled. “It’s the fault of the rich who still had money,

but wouldn't sacrifice it to save my bank and the people of Wisconsin! You can't blame me! I lost everything!"

"Mr. Lawson," she said with effort, "do you perhaps recall the name of the man who headed the corporation that owned the factory? The corporation to which you lent the money. It was called Amalgamated Service, wasn't it? Who was its president?"

"Oh, him? Yes, I remember him. His name was Lee Hunsacker. A very worthwhile young man, who's taken a terrible beating."

"Where is he now? Do you know his address?"

"Why—I believe he's somewhere in Oregon. Grangeville, Oregon. My secretary can give you his address. But I don't see of what interest ... Miss Taggart, if what you have in mind is to try to see Mr. Wesley Mouch, let me tell you that Mr. Mouch attaches a great deal of weight to my opinion in matters affecting such issues as railroads and other—"

"I have no desire to see Mr. Mouch," she said, rising.

"But then, I can't understand ... What, really, was your purpose in coming here?"

"I am trying to find a certain man who used to work for the Twentieth Century Motor Company."

"Why do you wish to find him?"

"I want him to work for my railroad."

He spread his arms wide, looking incredulous and slightly indignant. "At such a moment, when crucial issues hang in the balance, you choose to waste your time on looking for some one employee? Believe me, the fate of your railroad depends on Mr. Mouch much more than on any employee you ever find."

"Good day," she said.

She had turned to go, when he said, his voice jerky and high, "You haven't any right to despise me."

She stopped to look at him. "I have expressed no opinion."

"I am perfectly innocent, since I lost my money, since I lost all of my own money for a good cause. My motives were pure. I wanted nothing for myself. I've never sought anything for myself. Miss Taggart, I can proudly say that in all of my life I have *never* made a profit!"

Her voice was quiet, steady and solemn:

"Mr. Lawson, I think I should let you know that of all the statements a man can make, *that* is the one I consider most despicable."

* * *

"I never had a chance!" said Lee Hunsacker.

He sat in the middle of the kitchen, at a table cluttered with papers. He needed a shave; his shirt needed laundering. It was hard to judge his age: the swollen flesh of his face looked smooth and blank, untouched by experience; the graying hair and filmy eyes looked worn by exhaustion; he was forty-two.

"Nobody ever gave me a chance. I hope they're satisfied with what they've made of me. But don't think that I don't know it. I know I was cheated out of my birthright. Don't let them put on any airs about how kind they are. They're a stinking bunch of hypocrites."

"Who?" asked Dagny.

"Everybody," said Lee Hunsacker. "People are bastards at heart and it's no use pretending otherwise. Justice? Huh! Look at it!" His arm swept around him. "A man like me reduced to this!"

Beyond the window, the light of noon looked like grayish dusk among the bleak roofs and naked trees of a place that was not country and could never quite become a town. Dusk and dampness seemed soaked into the walls of the kitchen. A pile of breakfast dishes lay in the sink; a pot of stew simmered on the stove, emitting steam with the greasy odor of cheap meat; a dusty typewriter stood among the papers on the table.

"The Twentieth Century Motor Company," said Lee Hunsacker, "was one of the most illustrious names in the history of American industry. *I* was the president of that company. I owned that factory. But they wouldn't give me a chance."

"You were not the president of the Twentieth Century Motor Company, were you? I believe you headed a corporation called Amalgamated Service?"

"Yes, yes, but it's the same thing. We took over their factory. We were going to do just as well as they did. Better. We were just as important. Who the hell was Jed Starnes anyway? Nothing but a backwoods garage mechanic—did you know that that's how he started?—without any background at all. My family once belonged to the New York Four Hundred. My grandfather was a member of the national legislature. It's not my fault that my father couldn't afford to give me a car of my own, when he sent me to school. All the other boys had cars. My family name was just as good as any of theirs. When I went to college—" He broke off abruptly. "What newspaper did you say you're from?"

She had given him her name; she did not know why she now felt glad that he had not recognized it and why she preferred not to enlighten him. “I did not say I was from a newspaper,” she answered. “I need some information on that motor factory for a private purpose of my own, not for publication.”

“Oh.” He looked disappointed. He went on sullenly, as if she were guilty of a deliberate offense against him. “I thought maybe you came for an advance interview because I’m writing my autobiography.” He pointed to the papers on the table. “And what I intend to tell is plenty. I intend—Oh, hell!” he said suddenly, remembering something.

He rushed to the stove, lifted the lid off the pot and went through the motions of stirring the stew, hatefully, paying no attention to his performance. He flung the wet spoon down on the stove, letting the grease drip into the gas burners, and came back to the table.

“Yeah, I’ll write my autobiography *if* anybody ever gives me a chance,” he said. “How can I concentrate on serious work when this is the sort of thing I have to do?” He jerked his head at the stove. “Friends, huh! Those people think that just because they took me in, they can exploit me like a Chinese coolie! Just because I had no other place to go. They have it easy, those good old friends of mine. He never lifts a finger around the house, just sits in his store all day; a lousy little two-bit stationery store—can it compare in importance with the book I’m writing? And she goes out shopping and asks me to watch her damn stew for her. She knows that a writer needs peace and concentration, but does she care about that? Do you know what she did today?” He leaned confidentially across the table, pointing at the dishes in the sink. “She went to the market and left all the breakfast dishes there and said she’d do them later. I know what she wanted. She expected me to do them. Well, I’ll fool her. I’ll leave them just where they are.”

“Would you allow me to ask you a few questions about the motor factory?”

“Don’t imagine that that motor factory was the only thing in my life. I’d held many important positions before. I was prominently connected, at various times, with enterprises manufacturing surgical appliances, paper containers, men’s hats and vacuum cleaners. Of course, that sort of stuff didn’t give me much scope. But the motor factory—*that* was my big chance. That was what I’d been waiting for.”

“How did you happen to acquire it?”

“It was meant for me. It was my dream come true. The factory was shut down—bankrupt. The heirs of Jed Starnes had run it into the ground pretty fast. I

don't know exactly what it was, but there had been something goofy going on up there, so the company went broke. The railroad people closed their branch line. Nobody wanted the place, nobody would bid on it. But there it was, this great factory, with all the equipment, all the machinery, all the things that had made millions for Jed Starnes. That was the kind of setup I wanted, the kind of opportunity I was entitled to. So I got a few friends together and we formed the Amalgamated Service Corporation and we scraped up a little money. But we didn't have enough, we needed a loan to help us out and give us a start. It was a perfectly safe bet, we were young men embarking on great careers, full of eagerness and hope for the future. But do you think anybody gave us any encouragement? They did not. Not those greedy, entrenched vultures of privilege! How were we to succeed in life if nobody would give us a factory? We couldn't compete against the little snots who inherit whole chains of factories, could we? Weren't we entitled to the same break? Aw, don't let me hear anything about justice! I worked like a dog, trying to get somebody to lend us the money. But that bastard Midas Mulligan put me through the wringer."

She sat up straight. "Midas Mulligan?"

"Yeah—the banker who looked like a truck driver and acted it, too!"

"Did you know Midas Mulligan?"

"Did I know him? I'm the only man who ever beat him—not that it did me any good!"

At odd moments, with a sudden sense of uneasiness, she had wondered—as she wondered about the stories of deserted ships found floating at sea or of sourceless lights flashing in the sky—about the disappearance of Midas Mulligan. There was no reason why she felt that she had to solve these riddles, except that they were mysteries which had no business being mysteries: they could not be causeless, yet no known cause could explain them.

Midas Mulligan had once been the richest and, consequently, the most denounced man in the country. He had never taken a loss on any investment he made; everything he touched turned into gold. "It's because I know what to touch," he said. Nobody could grasp the pattern of his investments: he rejected deals that were considered flawlessly safe, and he put enormous amounts into ventures that no other banker would handle. Through the years, he had been the trigger that had sent unexpected, spectacular bullets of industrial success shooting over the country. It was he who had invested in Rearden Steel at its start, thus helping Rearden to complete the purchase of the abandoned steel mills in Pennsylvania. When an economist referred to him once as an audacious

gambler, Mulligan said, "The reason why you'll never get rich is because you think that what I do is gambling."

It was rumored that one had to observe a certain unwritten rule when dealing with Midas Mulligan: if an applicant for a loan ever mentioned his personal need or any personal feeling whatever, the interview ended and he was never given another chance to speak to Mr. Mulligan.

"Why yes, I can," said Midas Mulligan, when he was asked whether he could name a person more evil than the man with a heart closed to pity. "The man who uses another's pity for him as a weapon."

In his long career, he had ignored all the public attacks on him, except one. His first name had been Michael; when a newspaper columnist of the humanitarian clique nicknamed him Midas Mulligan and the tag stuck to him as an insult, Mulligan appeared in court and petitioned for a legal change of his first name to "Midas." The petition was granted.

In the eyes of his contemporaries, he was a man who had committed the one unforgivable sin: he was proud of his wealth.

These were the things Dagny had heard about Midas Mulligan; she had never met him. Seven years ago, Midas Mulligan had vanished. He left his home one morning and was never heard from again. On the next day, the depositors of the Mulligan Bank in Chicago received notices requesting that they withdraw their funds, because the bank was closing. In the investigations that followed, it was learned that Mulligan had planned the closing in advance and in minute detail; his employees were merely carrying out his instructions. It was the most orderly run on a bank that the country ever witnessed. Every depositor received his money down to the last fraction of interest due. All of the bank's assets had been sold piecemeal to various financial institutions. When the books were balanced, it was found that they balanced perfectly, to the penny; nothing was left over; the Mulligan Bank had been wiped out.

No clue was ever found to Mulligan's motive, to his personal fate or to the many millions of his personal fortune. The man and the fortune vanished as if they had never existed. No one had had any warning about his decision, and no events could be traced to explain it. If he had wished to retire—people wondered—why hadn't he sold his establishment at a huge profit, as he could have done, instead of destroying it? There was nobody to give an answer. He had no family, no friends. His servants knew nothing: he had left his home that morning as usual and did not come back; that was all.

There was—Dagny had thought uneasily for years—a quality of the

impossible about Mulligan's disappearance; it was as if a New York skyscraper had vanished one night, leaving nothing behind but a vacant lot on a street corner. A man like Mulligan, and a fortune such as he had taken along with him, could not stay hidden anywhere; a skyscraper could not get lost, it would be seen rising above any plain or forest chosen for its hiding place; were it destroyed, even its pile of rubble could not remain unnoticed. But Mulligan had gone—and in the seven years since, in the mass of rumors, guesses, theories, Sunday supplement stories, and eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen him in every part of the world, no clue to a plausible explanation had ever been discovered.

Among the stories, there was one so preposterously out of character that Dagny believed it to be true: nothing in Mulligan's nature could have given anyone ground to invent it. It was said that the last person to see him, on the spring morning of his disappearance, was an old woman who sold flowers on a Chicago street corner by the Mulligan Bank. She related that he stopped and bought a bunch of the year's first bluebells. His face was the happiest face she had ever seen; he had the look of a youth starting out into a great, unobstructed vision of life lying open before him; the marks of pain and tension, the sediment of years upon a human face, had been wiped off, and what remained was only joyous eagerness and peace. He picked up the flowers as if on a sudden impulse, and he winked at the old woman, as if he had some shining joke to share with her. He said, "Do you know how much I've always loved it—being alive?" She stared at him, bewildered, and he walked away, tossing the flowers like a ball in his hand—a broad, straight figure in a sedate, expensive, businessman's overcoat, going off into the distance against the straight cliffs of office buildings with the spring sun sparkling on their windows.

"Midas Mulligan was a vicious bastard with a dollar sign stamped on his heart," said Lee Hunsacker, in the fumes of the acrid stew. "My whole future depended upon a miserable half-million dollars, which was just small change to him, but when I applied for a loan, he turned me down flat—for no better reason than that I had no collateral to offer. How could I have accumulated any collateral, when nobody had ever given me a chance at anything big? Why did he lend money to others, but not to me? It was plain discrimination. He didn't even care about my feelings—he said that my past record of failures disqualified me for ownership of a vegetable pushcart, let alone a motor factory. What failures? I couldn't help it if a lot of ignorant grocers refused to co-operate with me about the paper containers. By what right did he pass judgment on my ability? Why did my plans for my own future have to depend upon the arbitrary

opinion of a selfish monopolist? I wasn't going to stand for that. I wasn't going to take it lying down. I brought suit against him."

"You did *what*?"

"Oh yes," he said proudly, "I brought suit. I'm sure it would seem strange in some of your hidebound Eastern states, but the state of Illinois had a very humane, very progressive law under which I could sue him. I must say it was the first case of its kind, but I had a very smart, liberal lawyer who saw a way for us to do it. It was an economic emergency law which said that people were forbidden to discriminate for any reason whatever against any person in any matter involving his livelihood. It was used to protect day laborers and such, but it applied to me and my partners as well, didn't it? So we went to court, and we testified about the bad breaks we'd all had in the past, and I quoted Mulligan saying that I couldn't even own a vegetable pushcart, and we proved that all the members of the Amalgamated Service corporation had no prestige, no credit, no way to make a living -and, therefore, the purchase of the motor factory was our only chance of livelihood—and, therefore, Midas Mulligan had no right to discriminate against us—and, therefore, we were entitled to demand a loan from him under the law. Oh, we had a perfect case all right, but the man who presided at the trial was Judge Narragansett, one of those old-fashioned monks of the bench who thinks like a mathematician and never feels the human side of anything. He just sat there all through the trial like a marble statue—like one of those blindfolded marble statues. At the end, he instructed the jury to bring in a verdict in favor of Midas Mulligan—and he said some very harsh things about me and my partners. But we appealed to a higher court—and the higher court reversed the verdict and ordered Mulligan to give us the loan on our terms. He had three months in which to comply, but before the three months were up, something happened that nobody can figure out and he vanished into thin air, he and his bank. There wasn't an extra penny left of that bank, to collect our lawful claim. We wasted a lot of money on detectives, trying to find him—as who didn't?—but we gave it up."

No—thought Dagny—no, apart from the sickening feeling it gave her, this case was not much worse than any of the other things that Midas Mulligan had borne for years. He had taken many losses under laws of a similar justice, under rules and edicts that had cost him much larger sums of money; he had borne them and fought and worked the harder; it was not likely that this case had broken him.

"What happened to Judge Narragansett?" she asked involuntarily, and

wondered what subconscious connection had made her ask it. She knew little about Judge Narragansett, but she had heard and remembered his name, because it was a name that belonged so exclusively to the North American continent. Now she realized suddenly that she had heard nothing about him for years.

“Oh, he retired,” said Lee Hunsacker.

“He did?” The question was almost a gasp.

“Yeah.”

“When?”

“Oh, about six months later.”

“What did he do after he retired?”

“I don’t know. I don’t think anybody’s heard from him since.”

He wondered why she looked frightened. Part of the fear she felt, was that she could not name its reason, either. “Please tell me about the motor factory,” she said with effort.

“Well, Eugene Lawson of the Community National Bank in Madison finally gave us a loan to buy the factory—but he was just a messy cheapskate, he didn’t have enough money to see us through, he couldn’t help us when we went bankrupt. It was not our fault. We had everything against us from the start. How could we run a factory when we had no railroad? Weren’t we entitled to a railroad? I tried to get them to reopen their branch line, but those damn people at Taggart Trans—” He stopped. “Say, are you by any chance one of *those* Taggarts?”

“I am the Operating Vice-President of Taggart Transcontinental.”

For a moment, he stared at her in blank stupor; she saw the struggle of fear, obsequiousness and hatred in his filmy eyes. The result was a sudden snarl: “I don’t need any of you big shots! Don’t think I’m going to be afraid of you. Don’t expect me to beg for a job. I’m not asking favors of anybody. I bet you’re not used to hear people talk to you this way, are you?”

“Mr. Hunsacker, I will appreciate it very much if you will give me the information I need about the factory.”

“You’re a little late getting interested. What’s the matter? Your conscience bothering you? You people let Jed Starnes grow filthy rich on that factory, but you wouldn’t give us a break. It was the same factory. We did everything he did. We started right in manufacturing the particular type of motor that had been his biggest money-maker for years. And then some newcomer nobody ever heard of opened a two-bit factory down in Colorado, by the name of Nielsen Motors, and put out a new motor of the same class as the Starnes model, at half the price! We

couldn't help that, could we? It was all right for Jed Starnes, no destructive competitor happened to come up in his time, but what were we to do? How could we fight this Nielsen, when nobody had given us a motor to compete with his?"

"Did you take over the Starnes research laboratory?"

"Yes, yes, it was there. Everything was there."

"His staff, too?"

"Oh, some of them. A lot of them had gone while the factory was closed."

"His research staff?"

"They were gone."

"Did you hire any research men of your own?"

"Yes, yes, some—but let me tell you, I didn't have much money to spend on such things as laboratories, when I never had enough funds to give me a breathing spell. I couldn't even pay the bills I owed for the absolutely essential modernizing and redecorating which I'd had to do -that factory was disgracefully old-fashioned from the standpoint of human efficiency. The executive offices had bare plaster walls and a dinky little washroom. Any modern psychologist will tell you that nobody could do his best in such depressing surroundings. I had to have a brighter color scheme in my office, and a decent modern bathroom with a stall shower. Furthermore, I spent a lot of money on a new cafeteria and a playroom and rest room for the workers. We had to have morale, didn't we? Any enlightened person knows that man is made by the material factors of his background, and that a man's mind is shaped by his tools of production. But people wouldn't wait for the laws of economic determinism to operate upon us. We never had a motor factory before. We had to let the tools condition our minds, didn't we? But nobody gave us time."

"Can you tell me about the work of your research staff?"

"Oh, I had a group of very promising young men, all of them guaranteed by diplomas from the best universities. But it didn't do me any good. I don't know what they were doing. I think they were just sitting around, eating up their salaries."

"Who was in charge of your laboratory?"

"Hell, how can I remember that now?"

"Do you remember any of the names of your research staff?"

"Do you think I had time to meet every hireling in person?"

"Did any of them ever mention to you any experiments with a ... with an entirely new kind of motor?"

“What motor? Let me tell you that an executive of my position does not hang around laboratories. I spent most of my time in New York and Chicago, trying to raise money to keep us going.”

“Who was the general manager of the factory?”

“A very able fellow by the name of Roy Cunningham. He died last year in an auto accident. Drunk driving, they said.”

“Can you give me the names and addresses of any of your associates? Anyone you remember?”

“I don’t know what’s become of them. I wasn’t in a mood to keep track of that.”

“Have you preserved any of the factory records?”

“I certainly have.”

She sat up eagerly. “Would you let me see them?”

“You bet!”

He seemed eager to comply; he rose at once and hurried out of the room. What he put down before her, when he returned, was a thick album of clippings: it contained his newspaper interviews and his press agent’s releases.

“I was one of the big industrialists, too,” he said proudly. “I was a national figure, as you can see. My life will make a book of deep, human significance. I’d have written it long ago, if I had the proper tools of production.” He banged angrily upon his typewriter. “I can’t work on this damn thing. It skips spaces. How can I get any inspiration and write a best seller with a typewriter that skips spaces?”

“Thank you, Mr. Hunsacker,” she said. “I believe this is all you can tell me.” She rose. “You don’t happen to know what became of the Starnes heirs?”

“Oh, they ran for cover after they’d wrecked the factory. There were three of them, two sons and a daughter. Last I heard, they were hiding their faces out in Durance, Louisiana.”

The last sight she caught of Lee Hunsacker, as she turned to go, was his sudden leap to the stove; he seized the lid off the pot and dropped it to the floor, scorching his fingers and cursing: the stew was burned.

* * *

Little was left of the Starnes fortune and less of the Starnes heirs.

“You won’t like having to see them, Miss Taggart,” said the chief of police of

Durance, Louisiana; he was an elderly man with a slow, firm manner and a look of bitterness acquired not in blind resentment, but in fidelity to clear-cut standards. “There’s all sorts of human beings to see in the world, there’s murderers and criminal maniacs—but, somehow, I think these Starnes persons are what decent people shouldn’t have to see. They’re a bad sort, Miss Taggart. Clammy and bad ... Yes, they’re still here in town—two of them, that is. The third one is dead. Suicide. That was four years ago. It’s an ugly story. He was the youngest of the three, Eric Starnes. He was one of those chronic young men who go around whining about their sensitive feelings, when they’re well past forty. He needed love, was his line. He was being kept by older women, when he could find them. Then he started running after a girl of sixteen, a nice girl who wouldn’t have anything to do with him. She married a boy she was engaged to. Eric Starnes got into their house on the wedding day, and when they came back from church after the ceremony, they found him in their bedroom, dead, messy dead, his wrists slashed.... Now I say there might be forgiveness for a man who kills himself quietly. Who can pass judgment on another man’s suffering and on the limit of what he can bear? But the man who kills himself, making a show of his death in order to hurt somebody, the man who gives his life for malice—there’s no forgiveness for him, no excuse, he’s rotten clear through, and what he deserves is that people spit at his memory, instead of feeling sorry for him and hurt, as he wanted them to be.... Well, that was Eric Starnes. I can tell you where to find the other two, if you wish.”

She found Gerald Starnes in the ward of a flophouse. He lay half-twisted on a cot. His hair was still black, but the white stubble of his chin was like a mist of dead weeds over a vacant face. He was soggy drunk. A pointless chuckle kept breaking his voice when he spoke, the sound of a static, unfocused malevolence.

“It went bust, the great factory. That’s what happened to it. Just went up and bust. Does that bother you, madam? The factory was rotten. Everybody is rotten. I’m supposed to beg somebody’s pardon, but I won’t. I don’t give a damn. People get fits trying to keep up the show, when it’s all rot, black rot, the automobiles, the buildings and the souls, and it doesn’t make any difference, one way or another. You should’ve seen the kind of literati who turned flip-flops when I whistled, when I had the dough. The professors, the poets, the intellectuals, the world-savers and the brother-lovers. Any way I whistled. I had lots of fun. I wanted to do good, but now I don’t. There isn’t any good. Not any goddamn good in the whole goddamn universe. I don’t propose to take a bath if I don’t feel like it, and that’s that. If you want to know anything about the factory,

ask my sister. My sweet sister who had a trust fund they couldn't touch, so she got out of it safe, even if she's in the hamburger class now, not the filet mignon à la Sauce Béarnaise, but would she give a penny of it to her brother? The noble plan that busted was her idea as much as mine, but will she give me a penny? Hah! Go take a look at the duchess, take a look. What do I care about the factory? It was just a pile of greasy machinery. I'll sell you all my rights, claims and title to it—for a drink. I'm the last of the Starnes name. It used to be a great name—Starnes. I'll sell it to you. You think I'm a stinking bum, but that goes for all the rest of them and for rich ladies like you, too. I wanted to do good for humanity. Hah! I wish they'd all boil in oil. Be lots of fun. I wish they'd choke. What does it matter? What does anything matter?"

On the next cot, a white-haired, shriveled little tramp turned in his sleep, moaning; a nickel clattered to the floor out of his rags. Gerald Starnes picked it up and slipped it into his own pocket. He glanced at Dagny. The creases of his face were a malignant smile.

"Want to wake him up and start trouble?" he asked. "If you do, I'll say that you're lying."

The ill-smelling bungalow, where she found Ivy Starnes, stood on the edge of town, by the shore of the Mississippi. Hanging strands of moss and clots of waxy foliage made the thick vegetation look as if it were drooling; the too many draperies, hanging in the stagnant air of a small room, had the same look. The smell came from undusted corners and from incense burning in silver jars at the feet of contorted Oriental deities. Ivy Starnes sat on a pillow like a baggy Buddha. Her mouth was a tight little crescent, the petulant mouth of a child demanding adulation—on the spreading, pallid face of a woman past fifty. Her eyes were two lifeless puddles of water. Her voice had the even, dripping monotone of rain:

"I can't answer the kind of questions you're asking, my girl. The research laboratory? The engineers? Why should I remember anything about them? It was my father who was concerned with such matters, not I. My father was an evil man who cared for nothing but business. He had no time for love, only for money. My brothers and I lived on a different plane. Our aim was not to produce gadgets, but to do good. We brought a great, new plan into the factory. It was eleven years ago. We were defeated by the greed, the selfishness and the base, animal nature of men. It was the eternal conflict between spirit and matter, between soul and body. They would not renounce their bodies, which was all we asked of them. I do not remember any of those men. I do not care to remember....

The engineers? I believe it was they who started the hemophilia.... Yes, that is what I said: the hemophilia—the slow leak—the loss of blood that cannot be stopped. They ran first. They deserted us, one after another ... Our plan? We put into practice that noble historical precept: From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. Everybody in the factory, from charwomen to president, received the same salary—the barest minimum necessary. Twice a year, we all gathered in a mass meeting, where every person presented his claim for what he believed to be his needs. We voted on every claim, and the will of the majority established every person's need and every person's ability. The income of the factory was distributed accordingly. Rewards were based on need, and penalties on ability. Those whose needs were voted to be the greatest, received the most. Those who had not produced as much as the vote said they could, were fined and had to pay the fines by working overtime without pay. That was our plan. It was based on the principle of selflessness. It required men to be motivated, not by personal gain, but by love for their brothers.”

Dagny heard a cold, implacable voice saying somewhere within her: Remember it—remember it well—it is not often that one can see pure evil—look at it—remember—and some day you'll find the words to name its essence.... She heard it through the screaming of other voices that cried in helpless violence: It's nothing—I've heard it before -I'm hearing it everywhere—it's nothing but the same old tripe—why can't I stand it?—I can't stand it—I can't stand it!

“What's the matter with you, my girl? Why did you jump up like that? Why are you shaking? ... What? Do speak louder, I can't hear you.... How did the plan work out? I do not care to discuss it. Things became very ugly indeed and went fouler every year. It has cost me my faith in human nature. In four years, a plan conceived, not by the cold calculations of the mind, but by the pure love of the heart, was brought to an end in the sordid mess of policemen, lawyers and bankruptcy proceedings. But I have seen my error and I am free of it. I am through with the world of machines, manufacturers and money, the world enslaved by matter. I am learning the emancipation of the spirit, as revealed in the great secrets of India, the release from bondage to flesh, the victory over physical nature, the triumph of the spirit over matter.”

Through the blinding white glare of anger, Dagny was seeing a long strip of concrete that had been a road, with weeds rising from its cracks, and the figure of a man contorted by a hand plow.

“But, my girl, I said that I do not remember.... But I do not know their names, I do not know any names, I do not know what sort of adventurers my father may

have had in that laboratory! ... Don't you hear me? ... I am not accustomed to being questioned in such manner and ... Don't keep repeating it. Don't you know any words but 'engineer'? ... Don't you hear me at all? ... What's the matter with you? I—I don't like your face, you're ... Leave me alone. I don't know who you are, I've never hurt you, I'm an old woman, don't look at me like that, I ... Stand back! Don't come near me or I'll call for help! I'll ... Oh, yes, yes, I know that one! The chief engineer. Yes. He was the head of the laboratory. Yes. William Hastings. That was his name—William Hastings. I remember. He went off to Brandon, Wyoming. He quit the day after we introduced the plan. He was the second man to quit us.... No. No, I don't remember who was the first. He wasn't anybody important."



The woman who opened the door had graying hair and a poised, distinguished look of grooming; it took Dagny a few seconds to realize that her garment was only a simple cotton housedress.

"May I see Mr. William Hastings?" asked Dagny.

The woman looked at her for the briefest instant of a pause; it was an odd glance, inquiring and grave. "May I ask your name?"

"I am Dagny Taggart, of Taggart Transcontinental."

"Oh. Please come in, Miss Taggart. I am Mrs. William Hastings." The measured tone of gravity went through every syllable of her voice, like a warning. Her manner was courteous, but she did not smile.

It was a modest home in the suburbs of an industrial town. Bare tree branches cut across the bright, cold blue of the sky, on the top of the rise that led to the house. The walls of the living room were silver-gray; sunlight hit the crystal stand of a lamp with a white shade; beyond an open door, a breakfast nook was papered in red-dotted white.

"Were you acquainted with my husband in business, Miss Taggart?"

"No. I have never met Mr. Hastings. But I should like to speak to him on a matter of business of crucial importance."

"My husband died five years ago, Miss Taggart."

Dagny closed her eyes; the dull, sinking shock contained the conclusions she did not have to make in words: This, then, had been the man she was seeking, and Rearden had been right; this was why the motor had been left unclaimed on

a junk pile.

"I'm sorry," she said, both to Mrs. Hastings and to herself.

The suggestion of a smile on Mrs. Hastings' face held sadness, but the face had no imprint of tragedy, only a grave look of firmness, acceptance and quiet serenity.

"Mrs. Hastings, would you permit me to ask you a few questions?"

"Certainly. Please sit down."

"Did you have some knowledge of your husband's scientific work?"

"Very little. None, really. He never discussed it at home."

"He was, at one time, chief engineer of the Twentieth Century Motor Company?"

"Yes. He had been employed by them for eighteen years."

"I wanted to ask Mr. Hastings about his work there and the reason why he gave it up. If you can tell me, I would like to know what happened in that factory."

The smile of sadness and humor appeared fully on Mrs. Hastings' face. "That is what I would like to know myself," she said. "But I'm afraid I shall never learn it now. I know why he left the factory. It was because of an outrageous scheme which the heirs of Jed Starnes established there. He would not work on such terms or for such people. But there was something else. I've always felt that something happened at Twentieth Century Motors, which he would not tell me."

"I'm extremely anxious to know any clue you may care to give me."

"I have no clue to it. I've tried to guess and given up. I cannot understand or explain it. But I know that something happened. When my husband left Twentieth Century, we came here and he took a job as head of the engineering department of Acme Motors. It was a growing, successful concern at the time. It gave my husband the kind of work he liked. He was not a person prone to inner conflicts, he had always been sure of his actions and at peace with himself. But for a whole year after we left Wisconsin, he acted as if he were tortured by something, as if he were struggling with a personal problem he could not solve. At the end of that year, he came to me one morning and told me that he had resigned from Acme Motors, that he was retiring and would not work anywhere else. He loved his work; it was his whole life. Yet he looked calm, self-confident and happy, for the first time since we'd come here. He asked me not to question him about the reason of his decision. I didn't question him and I didn't object. We had this house, we had our savings, we had enough to live on modestly for the rest of our days. I never learned his reason. We went on living here, quietly

and very happily. He seemed to feel a profound contentment. He had an odd serenity of spirit that I had never seen in him before. There was nothing strange in his behavior or activity—except that at times, very rarely, he went out without telling me where he went or whom he saw. In the last two years of his life, he went away for one month, each summer; he did not tell me where. Otherwise, he lived as he always had. He studied a great deal and he spent his time on engineering research of his own, working in the basement of our house. I don't know what he did with his notes and experimental models. I found no trace of them in the basement, after his death. He died five years ago, of a heart ailment from which he had suffered for some time."

Dagny asked hopelessly, "Did you know the nature of his experiments?"

"No. I know very little about engineering."

"Did you know any of his professional friends or co-workers, who might have been acquainted with his research?"

"No. When he was at Twentieth Century Motors, he worked such long hours that we had very little time for ourselves and we spent it together. We had no social life at all. He never brought his associates to the house."

"When he was at Twentieth Century, did he ever mention to you a motor he had designed, an entirely new type of motor that could have changed the course of all industry?"

"A motor? Yes. Yes, he spoke of it several times. He said it was an invention of incalculable importance. But it was not he who had designed it. It was the invention of a young assistant of his."

She saw the expression on Dagny's face, and added slowly, quizzically, without reproach, merely in sad amusement, "I see."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Dagny, realizing that her emotion had shot to her face and become a smile as obvious as a cry of relief.

"It's quite all right. I understand. It's the inventor of that motor that you're interested in. I don't know whether he is still alive, but at least I have no reason to think that he isn't."

"I'd give half my life to know that he is—and to find him. It's as important as that, Mrs. Hastings. Who is he?"

"I don't know. I don't know his name or anything about him. I never knew any of the men on my husband's staff. He told me only that he had a young engineer who, some day, would up-turn the world. My husband did not care for anything in people except ability. I think this was the only man he ever loved. He didn't say so, but I could tell it, just by the way he spoke of this young

assistant. I remember—the day he told me that the motor was completed—how his voice sounded when he said, ‘And he’s only twenty-six!’ This was about a month before the death of Jed Starnes. He never mentioned the motor or the young engineer, after that.”

“You don’t know what became of the young engineer?”

“No.”

“You can’t suggest any way to find him?”

“No.”

“You have no clue, no lead to help me learn his name?”

“None. Tell me, was that motor extremely valuable?”

“More valuable than any estimate I could give you.”

“It’s strange, because, you see, I thought of it once, some years after we’d left Wisconsin, and I asked my husband what had become of that invention he’d said was so great, what would be done with it. He looked at me very oddly and answered, ‘Nothing.’ ”

“Why?”

“He wouldn’t tell me.”

“Can you remember anyone at all who worked at Twentieth Century? Anyone who knew that young engineer? Any friend of his?”

“No, I ... Wait! Wait, I think I can give you a lead. I can tell you where to find one friend of his. I don’t even know that friend’s name, either, but I know his address. It’s an odd story. I’d better explain how it happened. One evening—about two years after we’d come here—my husband was going out and I needed our car that night, so he asked me to pick him up after dinner at the restaurant of the railroad station. He did not tell me with whom he was having dinner. When I drove up to the station, I saw him standing outside the restaurant with two men. One of them was young and tall. The other was elderly; he looked very distinguished. I would still recognize those men anywhere; they had the kind of faces one doesn’t forget. My husband saw me and left them. They walked away toward the station platform; there was a train coming. My husband pointed after the young man and said, ‘Did you see him? That’s the boy I told you about.’ ‘The one who’s the great maker of motors?’ ‘The one who was.’ ”

“And he told you nothing else?”

“Nothing else. This was nine years ago. Last spring, I went to visit my brother who lives in Cheyenne. One afternoon, he took the family out for a long drive. We went up into pretty wild country, high in the Rockies, and we stopped at a roadside diner. There was a distinguished, gray-haired man behind the counter. I

kept staring at him while he fixed our sandwiches and coffee, because I knew that I had seen his face before, but could not remember where. We drove on, we were miles away from the diner, when I remembered. You'd better go there. It's on Route 86, in the mountains, west of Cheyenne, near a small industrial settlement by the Lennox Copper Foundry. It seems strange, but I'm certain of it: the cook in that diner is the man I saw at the railroad station with my husband's young idol."



The diner stood on the summit of a long, hard climb. Its glass walls spread a coat of polish over the view of rocks and pines descending in broken ledges to the sunset. It was dark below, but an even, glowing light still remained in the diner, as in a small pool left behind by a receding tide.

Dagny sat at the end of the counter, eating a hamburger sandwich. It was the best-cooked food she had ever tasted, the product of simple ingredients and of an unusual skill. Two workers were finishing their dinner; she was waiting for them to depart.

She studied the man behind the counter. He was slender and tall; he had an air of distinction that belonged in an ancient castle or in the inner office of a bank; but his peculiar quality came from the fact that he made the distinction seem appropriate here, behind the counter of a diner. He wore a cook's white jacket as if it were a full-dress suit. There was an expert competence in his manner of working; his movements were easy, intelligently economical. He had a lean face and gray hair that blended in tone with the cold blue of his eyes; somewhere beyond his look of courteous sternness, there was a note of humor, so faint that it vanished if one tried to discern it.

The two workers finished, paid and departed, each leaving a dime for a tip. She watched the man as he removed their dishes, put the dimes into the pocket of his white jacket, wiped the counter, working with swift precision. Then he turned and looked at her. It was an impersonal glance, not intended to invite conversation; but she felt certain that he had long since noted her New York suit, her high-heeled pumps, her air of being a woman who did not waste her time; his cold, observant eyes seemed to tell her that he knew she did not belong here and that he was waiting to discover her purpose.

"How is business?" she asked.

“Pretty bad. They’re going to close the Lennox Foundry next week, so I’ll have to close soon, too, and move on.” His voice was clear, impersonally cordial.

“Where to?”

“I haven’t decided.”

“What sort of thing do you have in mind?”

“I don’t know. I’m thinking of opening a garage, if I can find the right spot in some town.”

“Oh no! You’re too good at your job to change it. You shouldn’t want to be anything but a cook.”

A strange, fine smile moved the curve of his mouth. “No?” he asked courteously.

“No! How would you like a job in New York?” He looked at her, astonished. “I’m serious. I can give you a job on a big railroad, in charge of the dining-car department.”

“May I ask why you should want to?”

She raised the hamburger sandwich in its white paper napkin. “There’s one of the reasons.”

“Thank you. What are the others?”

“I don’t suppose you’ve lived in a big city, or you’d know how miserably difficult it is to find any competent men for any job whatever.”

“I know a little about that.”

“Well? How about it, then? Would you like a job in New York at ten thousand dollars a year?”

“No.”

She had been carried away by the joy of discovering and rewarding ability. She looked at him silently, shocked. “I don’t think you understood me,” she said.

“I did.”

“You’re refusing an opportunity of this kind?”

“Yes.”

“But why?”

“That is a personal matter.”

“Why should you work like this, when you can have a better job?”

“I am not looking for a better job.”

“You don’t want a chance to rise and make money?”

“No. Why do you insist?”

“Because I hate to see ability being wasted!”

He said slowly, intently, "So do I."

Something in the way he said it made her feel the bond of some profound emotion which they held in common; it broke the discipline that forbade her ever to call for help. "I'm so sick of them!" Her voice startled her: it was an involuntary cry. "I'm so hungry for any sight of anyone who's able to do whatever it is he's doing!"

She pressed the back of her hand to her eyes, trying to dam the outbreak of a despair she had not permitted herself to acknowledge; she had not known the extent of it, nor how little of her endurance the quest had left her.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice low. It sounded, not as an apology, but as a statement of compassion.

She glanced up at him. He smiled, and she knew that the smile was intended to break the bond which he, too, had felt: the smile had a trace of courteous mockery. He said, "But I don't believe that you came all the way from New York just to hunt for railroad cooks in the Rockies."

"No. I came for something else." She leaned forward, both forearms braced firmly against the counter, feeling calm and in tight control again, sensing a dangerous adversary. "Did you know, about ten years ago, a young engineer who worked for the Twentieth Century Motor Company?"

She counted the seconds of a pause; she could not define the nature of the way he looked at her, except that it was the look of some special attentiveness.

"Yes, I did," he answered.

"Could you give me his name and address?"

"What for?"

"It's crucially important that I find him."

"That man? Of what importance is he?"

"He is the most important man in the world."

"Really? Why?"

"Did you know anything about his work?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that he hit upon an idea of the most tremendous consequence?"

He let a moment pass. "May I ask who you are?"

"Dagney Taggart. I'm the Vice-Pres—"

"Yes, Miss Taggart. I know who you are."

He said it with impersonal deference. But he looked as if he had found the answer to some special question in his mind and was not astonished any longer.

“Then you know that my interest is not idle,” she said. “I’m in a position to give him the chance he needs and I’m prepared to pay anything he asks.”

“May I ask what has aroused your interest in him?”

“His motor.”

“How did you happen to know about his motor?”

“I found a broken remnant of it in the ruins of the Twentieth Century factory. Not enough to reconstruct it or to learn how it worked. But enough to know that it did work and that it’s an invention which can save my railroad, the country and the economy of the whole world. Don’t ask me to tell you now what trail I’ve followed, trying to trace that motor and to find its inventor. That’s not of any importance, even my life and work are not of any importance to me right now, nothing is of any importance, except that I must find him. Don’t ask me how I happened to come to you. You’re the end of the trail. Tell me his name.”

He had listened without moving, looking straight at her; the attentiveness of his eyes seemed to take hold of every word and store it carefully away, giving her no clue to his purpose. He did not move for a long time. Then he said, “Give it up, Miss Taggart. You won’t find him.”

“What is his name?”

“I can tell you nothing about him.”

“Is he still alive?”

“I can tell you nothing.”

“What is *your* name?”

“Hugh Akston.”

Through the blank seconds of recapturing her mind, she kept telling herself: You’re hysterical ... don’t be preposterous ... it’s just a coincidence of names—while she knew, in certainty and numb, inexplicable terror, that this was *the* Hugh Akston.

“Hugh Akston?” she stammered. “The philosopher? ... The last of the advocates of reason?”

“Why, yes,” he answered pleasantly. “Or the first of their return.”

He did not seem startled by her shock, but he seemed to find it unnecessary. His manner was simple, almost friendly, as if he felt no need to hide his identity and no resentment at its being discovered.

“I didn’t think that any young person would recognize my name or attach any significance to it, nowadays,” he said.

“But ... but what are you doing here?” Her arm swept at the room. “This doesn’t make sense!”

“Are you sure?”

“What is it? A stunt? An experiment? A secret mission? Are you studying something for some special purpose?”

“No, Miss Taggart. I’m earning my living.” The words and the voice had the genuine simplicity of truth.

“Dr. Akston, I ... it’s inconceivable, it’s ... You’re ... you’re a philosopher ... the greatest philosopher living ... an immortal name ... why would *you* do *this*?”

“Because I am a philosopher, Miss Taggart.”

She knew with certainty—even though she felt as if her capacity for certainty and for understanding were gone—that she would obtain no help from him, that questions were useless, that he would give her no explanation, neither of the inventor’s fate nor of his own.

“Give it up, Miss Taggart,” he said quietly, as if giving proof that he could guess her thoughts, as she had known he would. “It is a hopeless quest, the more hopeless because you have no inkling of what an impossible task you have chosen to undertake. I would like to spare you the strain of trying to devise some argument, trick or plea that would make me give you the information you are seeking. Take my word for it: it can’t be done. You said I’m the end of your trail. It’s a blind alley, Miss Taggart. Do not attempt to waste your money and effort on other, more conventional methods of inquiry: do not hire detectives. They will learn nothing. You may choose to ignore my warning, but I think that you are a person of high intelligence, able to know that I know what I am saying. Give it up. The secret you are trying to solve involves something greater—much greater—than the invention of a motor run by atmospheric electricity. There is only one helpful suggestion that I can give you: By the essence and nature of existence, contradictions cannot exist. If you find it inconceivable that an invention of genius should be abandoned among ruins, and that a philosopher should wish to work as a cook in a diner—check your premises. You will find that one of them is wrong.”

She started: she remembered that she had heard this before and that it was Francisco who had said it. And then she remembered that this man had been one of Francisco’s teachers.

“As you wish, Dr. Akston,” she said. “I won’t attempt to question you about it. But would you permit me to ask you a question on an entirely different subject?”

“Certainly.”

“Dr. Robert Stadler once told me that when you were at the Patrick Henry

University, you had three students who were your favorites and his, three brilliant minds from whom you expected a great future. One of them was Francisco d'Anconia."

"Yes. Another was Ragnar Danneskjöld."

"Incidentally—this is not my question—who was the third?"

"His name would mean nothing to you. He is not famous."

"Dr. Stadler said that you and he were rivals over these three students, because you both regarded them as your sons."

"Rivals? *He* lost them."

"Tell me, are you proud of the way these three have turned out?"

He looked off, into the distance, at the dying fire of the sunset on the farthest rocks; his face had the look of a father who watches his sons bleeding on a battlefield. He answered:

"More proud than I had ever hoped to be."

It was almost dark. He turned sharply, took a package of cigarettes from his pocket, pulled out one cigarette, but stopped, remembering her presence, as if he had forgotten it for a moment, and extended the package to her. She took a cigarette and he struck the brief flare of a match, then shook it out, leaving only two small points of fire in the darkness of a glass room and of miles of mountains beyond it.

She rose, paid her bill, and said, "Thank you, Dr. Akston. I will not molest you with tricks or pleas. I will not hire detectives. But I think I should tell you that I will not give up. I must find the inventor of that motor. I will find him."

"Not until the day when he chooses to find *you*—as he will."

When she walked to her car, he switched on the lights in the diner, she saw the mailbox by the side of the road and noted the incredible fact that the name "Hugh Akston" stood written openly across it.

She had driven far down the winding road, and the lights of the diner were long since out of sight, when she noticed that she was enjoying the taste of the cigarette he had given her: it was different from any she had ever smoked before. She held the small remnant to the light of the dashboard, looking for the name of the brand. There was no name, only a trademark. Stamped in gold on the thin, white paper there stood the sign of the dollar.

She examined it curiously: she had never heard of that brand before. Then she remembered the old man at the cigar stand of the Taggart Terminal, and smiled, thinking that this was a specimen for his collection. She stamped out the fire and dropped the butt into her handbag.

Train Number 57 was lined along the track, ready to leave for Wyatt Junction, when she reached Cheyenne, left her car at the garage where she had rented it, and walked out on the platform of the Taggart station. She had half an hour to wait for the eastbound main liner to New York. She walked to the end of the platform and leaned wearily against a lamppost; she did not want to be seen and recognized by the station employees, she did not want to talk to anyone, she needed rest. A few people stood in clusters on the half-deserted platform; animated conversations seemed to be going on, and newspapers were more prominently in evidence than usual.

She looked at the lighted windows of Train Number 57—for a moment's relief in the sight of a victorious achievement. Train Number 57 was about to start down the track of the John Galt Line, through the towns, through the curves of the mountains, past the green signals where people had stood cheering and the valleys where rockets had risen to the summer sky. Twisted remnants of leaves now hung on the branches beyond the train's roof line, and the passengers wore furs and mufflers, as they climbed aboard. They moved with the casual manner of a daily event, with the security of expecting a performance long since taken for granted.... We've done it—she thought—this much, at least, is done.

It was the chance conversation of two men somewhere behind her that came beating suddenly against her closed attention.

“But laws shouldn't be passed that way, so quickly.”

“They're not laws, they're directives.”

“Then it's illegal.”

“It's not illegal, because the Legislature passed a law last month giving him the power to issue directives.”

“I don't think directives should be sprung on people that way, out of the blue, like a punch in the nose.”

“Well, there's no time to palaver when it's a national emergency.”

“But I don't think it's right and it doesn't jibe. How is Rearden going to do it, when it says here—”

“Why should you worry about Rearden? He's rich enough. He can find a way to do anything.”

Then she leaped to the first newsstand in sight and seized a copy of the evening paper.

It was on the front page. Wesley Mouch, Top Co-ordinator of the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources, “in a surprise move,” said the paper, “and in the name of the national emergency,” had issued a set of

directives, which were strung in a column down the page:

The railroads of the country were ordered to reduce the maximum speed of all trains to sixty miles per hour—to reduce the maximum length of all trains to sixty cars—and to run the same number of trains in every state of a zone composed of five neighboring states, the country being divided into such zones for the purpose.

The steel mills of the country were ordered to limit the maximum production of any metal alloy to an amount equal to the production of other metal alloys by other mills placed in the same classification of plant capacity—and to supply a fair share of any metal alloy to all consumers who might desire to obtain it.

All the manufacturing establishments of the country, of any size and nature, were forbidden to move from their present locations, except when granted a special permission to do so by the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources.

To compensate the railroads of the country for the extra costs involved and “to cushion the process of readjustment,” a moratorium on payments of interest and principal on all railroad bonds—secured and unsecured, convertible and non-convertible—was declared for a period of five years.

To provide the funds for the personnel to enforce these directives, a special tax was imposed on the state of Colorado, “as the state best able to assist the needier states to bear the brunt of the national emergency,” such tax to consist of five per cent of the gross sales of Colorado’s industrial concerns.

The cry she uttered was one she had never permitted herself before, because she made it her pride always to answer it herself—but she saw a man standing a few steps away, she did not see that he was a ragged bum, and she uttered the cry because it was the plea of reason and he was a human figure:

“What are we going to do?”

The bum grinned mirthlessly and shrugged:

“Who is John Galt?”

It was not Taggart Transcontinental that stood as the focus of terror in her mind, it was not the thought of Hank Rearden tied to a rack pulled in opposite directions—it was Ellis Wyatt. Wiping out the rest, filling her consciousness, leaving no room for words, no time for wonder, as a glaring answer to the questions she had not begun to ask, stood two pictures: Ellis Wyatt’s implacable figure in front of her desk, saying, “It is now in your power to destroy me; I may have to go; but if I go, I’ll make sure that I take all the rest of you along with me”—and the circling violence of Ellis Wyatt’s body when he flung a glass to

shatter against the wall.

The only consciousness the pictures left her was the feeling of the approach of some unthinkable disaster, and the feeling that she had to outrun it. She had to reach Ellis Wyatt and stop him. She did not know what it was that she had to prevent. She knew only that she had to stop him.

And because, were she lying crushed under the ruins of a building, were she torn by the bomb of an air raid, so long as she was still in existence she would know that action is man's foremost obligation, regardless of anything he feels—she was able to run down the platform and to see the face of the stationmaster when she found him—she was able to order: “Hold Number 57 for me!”—then to run to the privacy of a telephone booth in the darkness beyond the end of the platform, and to give the long-distance operator the number of Ellis Wyatt's house.

She stood, propped up by the walls of the booth, her eyes closed, and listened to the dead whirl of metal which was the sound of a bell ringing somewhere. It brought no answer. The bell kept coming in sudden spasms, like a drill going through her ear, through her body. She clutched the receiver as if, unheeded, it were still a form of contact. She wished the bell were louder. She forgot that the sound she heard was not the one ringing in his house. She did not know that she was screaming, “Ellis, don't! Don't! Don't!”—until she heard the cold, reproving voice of the operator say, “Your party does not answer.”

She sat at the window of a coach of Train Number 57, and listened to the clicking of the wheels on the rails of Rearden Metal. She sat, unresisting, swaying with the motion of the train. The black luster of the window hid the countryside she did not want to see. It was her second run on the John Galt Line, and she tried not to think of the first.

The bondholders, she thought, the bondholders of the John Galt Line—it was to her honor that they had entrusted their money, the saving and achievement of years, it was on her ability that they had staked it, it was on her work that they had relied and on their own—and she had been made to betray them into a looters' trap: there would be no trains and no life-blood of freight, the John Galt Line had been only a drainpipe that had permitted Jim Taggart to make a deal and to drain their wealth, unearned, into his pocket, in exchange for letting others drain his railroad—the bonds of the John Galt Line, which, this morning, had been the proud guardians of their owners' security and future, had become in the space of an hour, scraps of paper that no one would buy, with no value, no future, no power, save the power to close the doors and stop the wheels of the last hope of

the country-and Taggart Transcontinental was not a living plant, fed by blood it had worked to produce, but a cannibal of the moment, devouring the unborn children of greatness.

The tax on Colorado, she thought, the tax collected from Ellis Wyatt to pay for the livelihood of those whose job was to tie him and make him unable to live, those who would stand on guard to see that he got no trains, no tank cars, no pipeline of Rearden Metal—Ellis Wyatt, stripped of the right of self-defense, left without voice, without weapons, and worse: made to be the tool of his own destruction, the supporter of his own destroyers, the provider of their food and of their weapons—Ellis Wyatt being choked, with his own bright energy turned against him as the noose—Ellis Wyatt, who had wanted to tap an unlimited source of shale oil and who spoke of a Second Renaissance....

She sat bent over, her head on her arms, slumped at the ledge of the window—while the great curves of the green-blue rail, the mountains, the valleys, the new towns of Colorado went by in the darkness, unseen.

The sudden jolt of brakes on wheels threw her upright. It was an unscheduled stop, and the platform of the small station was crowded with people, all looking off in the same direction. The passengers around her were pressing to the windows, staring. She leaped to her feet, she ran down the aisle, down the steps, into the cold wind sweeping the platform.

In the instant before she saw it and her scream cut the voices of the crowd, she knew that she had known that which she was to see. In a break between mountains, lighting the sky, throwing a glow that swayed on the roofs and walls of the station, the hill of Wyatt Oil was a solid sheet of flame.

Later, when they told her that Ellis Wyatt had vanished, leaving nothing behind but a board he had nailed to a post at the foot of the hill, when she looked at his handwriting on the board, she felt as if she had almost known that these would be the words:

“I am leaving it as I found it. Take over. It’s yours.”

PART II

EITHER-OR

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WHO BELONGED ON EARTH

Dr. Robert Stadler paced his office, wishing he would not feel the cold.

Spring had been late in coming. Beyond the window, the dead gray of the hills looked like the smeared transition from the soiled white of the sky to the leaden black of the river. Once in a while, a distant patch of hillside flared into a silver-yellow that was almost green, then vanished. The clouds kept cracking for the width of a single sunray, then oozing closed again. It was not cold in the office, thought Dr. Stadler, it was that view that froze the place.

It was not cold today, the chill was in his bones—he thought—the stored accumulation of the winter months, when he had had to be distracted from his work by an awareness of such a matter as inadequate heating and people had talked about conserving fuel. It was preposterous, he thought, this growing intrusion of the accidents of nature into the affairs of men: it had never mattered before, if a winter happened to be unusually severe; if a flood washed out a section of railroad track, one did not spend two weeks eating canned vegetables; if an electric storm struck some power station, an establishment such as the State Science Institute was not left without electricity for five days. Five days of stillness this winter, he thought, with the great laboratory motors stopped and irretrievable hours wiped out, when his staff had been working on problems that involved the heart of the universe. He turned angrily away from the window—but stopped and turned back to it again. He did not want to see the book that lay on his desk.

He wished Dr. Ferris would come. He glanced at his watch: Dr. Ferris was late—an astonishing matter—late for an appointment with *him*—Dr. Floyd Ferris, the valet of science, who had always faced him in a manner that suggested an apology for having but one hat to take off.

This was outrageous weather for the month of May, he thought, looking down at the river; it was certainly the weather that made him feel as he did, not the book. He had placed the book in plain view on his desk, when he had noted that his reluctance to see it was more than mere revulsion, that it contained the element of an emotion never to be admitted. He told himself that he had risen

from his desk, not because the book lay there, but merely because he had wanted to move, feeling cold. He paced the room, trapped between the desk and the window. He would throw that book in the ash can where it belonged, he thought, just as soon as he had spoken to Dr. Ferris.

He watched the patch of green and sunlight on the distant hill, the promise of spring in a world that looked as if no grass or bud would ever function again. He smiled eagerly—and when the patch vanished, he felt a stab of humiliation, at his own eagerness, at the desperate way he had wanted to hold it. It reminded him of that interview with the eminent novelist, last winter. The novelist had come from Europe to write an article about him—and he, who had once despised interviews, had talked eagerly, lengthily, too lengthily, seeing a promise of intelligence in the novelist's face, feeling a causeless, desperate need to be understood. The article had come out as a collection of sentences that gave him exorbitant praise and garbled every thought he had expressed. Closing the magazine, he had felt what he was feeling now at the desertion of a sunray.

All right—he thought, turning away from the window—he would concede that attacks of loneliness had begun to strike him at times; but it was a loneliness to which he was entitled, it was hunger for the response of some living, thinking mind. He was so tired of all those people, he thought in contemptuous bitterness; he dealt with cosmic rays, while they were unable to deal with an electric storm.

He felt the sudden contraction of his mouth, like a slap denying him the right to pursue this course of thought. He was looking at the book on his desk. Its glossy jacket was glaring and new; it had been published two weeks ago. But I had nothing to do with it!—he screamed to himself; the scream seemed wasted on a merciless silence; nothing answered it, no echo of forgiveness. The title on the book's jacket was *Why Do You Think You Think?*

There was no sound in that courtroom silence within him, no pity, no voice of defense—nothing but the paragraphs which his great memory had reprinted on his brain:

“Thought is a primitive superstition. Reason is an irrational idea. The childish notion that we are able to think has been mankind's costliest error.”

“What you think you think is an illusion created by your glands, your emotions and, in the last analysis, by the content of your stomach.”

“That gray matter you're so proud of is like a mirror in an amusement park which transmits to you nothing but distorted signals from a reality forever beyond your grasp.”

“The more certain you feel of your rational conclusions, the more certain you

are to be wrong. Your brain being an instrument of distortion, the more active the brain the greater the distortion.”

“The giants of the intellect, whom you admire so much, once taught you that the earth was flat and that the atom was the smallest particle of matter. The entire history of science is a progression of exploded fallacies, not of achievements.”

“The more we know, the more we learn that we know nothing.”

“Only the crassest ignoramus can still hold to the old-fashioned notion that seeing is believing. That which you see is the first thing to disbelieve.”

“A scientist knows that a stone is not a stone at all. It is, in fact, identical with a feather pillow. Both are only a cloud formation of the same invisible, whirling particles. But, you say, you can’t use a stone for a pillow? Well, that merely proves your helplessness in the face of actual reality.”

“The latest scientific discoveries—such as the tremendous achievements of Dr. Robert Stadler—have demonstrated conclusively that our reason is incapable of dealing with the nature of the universe. These discoveries have led scientists to contradictions which are impossible, according to the human mind, but which exist in reality nonetheless. If you have not yet heard it, my dear old-fashioned friends, it has now been proved that the rational is the insane.”

“Do not expect consistency. Everything is a contradiction of everything else. Nothing exists but contradictions.”

“Do not look for ‘common sense.’ To demand ‘sense’ is the hallmark of nonsense. Nature does not make sense. Nothing makes sense. The only crusaders for ‘sense’ are the studious type of adolescent old maid who can’t find a boy friend, and the old-fashioned shopkeeper who thinks that the universe is as simple as his neat little inventory and beloved cash register.”

“Let us break the chains of the prejudice called Logic. Are we going to be stopped by a syllogism?”

“So you think you’re sure of your opinions? You cannot be sure of anything. Are you going to endanger the harmony of your community, your fellowship with your neighbors, your standing, reputation, good name and financial security—for the sake of an illusion? For the sake of the mirage of thinking that you think? Are you going to run risks and court disasters—at a precarious time like ours—by opposing the existing social order in the name of those imaginary notions of yours which you call your convictions? You say that you’re sure you’re right? Nobody is right, or ever can be. You feel that the world around you is wrong? You have no means to know it. Everything is wrong in human eyes—

so why fight it? Don't argue. Accept. Adjust yourself. Obey."

The book was written by Dr. Floyd Ferris and published by the State Science Institute.

"I had nothing to do with it!" said Dr. Robert Stadler. He stood still by the side of his desk, with the uncomfortable feeling of having missed some beat of time, of not knowing how long the preceding moment had lasted. He had pronounced the words aloud, in a tone of rancorous sarcasm directed at whoever had made him say it.

He shrugged. Resting on the belief that self-mockery is an act of virtue, the shrug was the emotional equivalent of the sentence: You're Robert Stadler, don't act like a high-school neurotic. He sat down at his desk and pushed the book aside with the back of his hand.

Dr. Floyd Ferris arrived half an hour late. "Sorry," he said, "but my car broke down again on the way from Washington and I had a hell of a time trying to find somebody to fix it—there's getting to be so damn few cars out on the road that half the service stations are closed."

There was more annoyance than apology in his voice. He sat down without waiting for an invitation to do so.

Dr. Floyd Ferris would not have been noticed as particularly handsome in any other profession, but in the one he had chosen he was always described as "that good-looking scientist." He was six feet tall and forty-five years old, but he managed to look taller and younger. He had an air of immaculate grooming and a ballroom grace of motion, but his clothes were severe, his suits being usually black or midnight blue. He had a finely traced mustache, and his smooth black hair made the Institute office boys say that he used the same shoe polish on both ends of him. He did not mind repeating, in the tone of a joke on himself, that a movie producer once said he would cast him for the part of a titled European gigolo. He had begun his career as a biologist, but that was forgotten long ago; he was famous as the Top Co-ordinator of the State Science Institute.

Dr. Stadler glanced at him with astonishment—the lack of apology was unprecedented—and said dryly, "It seems to me that you are spending a great deal of your time in Washington."

"But, Dr. Stadler, wasn't it you who once paid me the compliment of calling me the watchdog of this Institute?" said Dr. Ferris pleasantly. "Isn't that my most essential duty?"

"A few of your duties seem to be accumulating right around this place. Before I forget it, would you mind telling me what's going on here about that oil

shortage mess?”

He could not understand why Dr. Ferris’ face tightened into an injured look. “You will permit me to say that this is unexpected and unwarranted,” said Dr. Ferris in that tone of formality which conceals pain and reveals martyrdom. “None of the authorities involved have found cause for criticism. We have just submitted a detailed report on the progress of the work to date to the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources, and Mr. Wesley Mouch has expressed himself as satisfied. We have done our best on that project. We have heard no one else describe it as a mess. Considering the difficulties of the terrain, the hazards of the fire and the fact that it has been only six months since we—”

“What are you talking about?” asked Dr. Stadler.

“The Wyatt Reclamation Project. Isn’t that what you asked me?”

“No,” said Dr. Stadler, “no, I ... Wait a moment. Let me get this straight. I seem to recall something about this Institute taking charge of a reclamation project. What is it that you’re reclaiming?”

“Oil,” said Dr. Ferris. “The Wyatt oil fields.”

“That was a fire, wasn’t it? In Colorado? That was ... wait a moment ... that was the man who set fire to his own oil wells.”

“I’m inclined to believe that that’s a rumor created by public hysteria,” said Dr. Ferris dryly. “A rumor with some undesirable, unpatriotic implications. I wouldn’t put too much faith in those newspaper stories. Personally, I believe that it was an accident and that Ellis Wyatt perished in the fire.”

“Well, who owns those fields now?”

“Nobody—at the moment. There being no will or heirs, the government has taken charge of operating the fields—as a measure of public necessity—for seven years. If Ellis Wyatt does not return within that time, he will be considered officially dead.”

“Well, why did they come to you—to us, for such an unlikely assignment as oil pumping?”

“Because it is a problem of great technological difficulty, requiring the services of the best scientific talent available. You see, it is a matter of reconstructing the special method of oil extraction that Wyatt had employed. His equipment is still there, though in a dreadful condition; some of his processes are known, but somehow there is no full record of the complete operation or the basic principle involved. That is what we have to rediscover.”

“And how is it going?”

“The progress is most gratifying. We have just been granted a new and larger

appropriation. Mr. Wesley Mouch is pleased with our work. So are Mr. Balch of the Emergency Commission, Mr. Anderson of Crucial Supplies and Mr. Pettibone of Consumers' Protection. I do not see what more could be expected of us. The project is fully successful."

"Have you produced any oil?"

"No, but we have succeeded in forcing a flow from one of the wells, to the extent of six and a half gallons. This, of course, is merely of experimental significance, but you must take into consideration the fact that we had to spend three full months just to put out the fire, which has now been totally—almost totally—extinguished. We have a much tougher problem than Wyatt ever had, because he started from scratch while we have to deal with the disfigured wreckage of an act of vicious, anti-social sabotage which ... I mean to say, it is a difficult problem, but there is no doubt that we will be able to solve it."

"Well, what I really asked you about was the oil shortage here, in the Institute. The level of temperature maintained in this building all winter was outrageous. They told me that they had to conserve oil. Surely you could have seen to it that the matter of keeping this place adequately supplied with such things as oil was handled more efficiently."

"Oh, is that what you had in mind, Dr. Stadler? Oh, but I am so sorry!" The words came with a bright smile of relief on Dr. Ferris' face; his solicitous manner returned. "Do you mean that the temperature was low enough to cause you discomfort?"

"I mean that I nearly froze to death."

"But that is unforgivable! Why didn't they tell me? Please accept my personal apology, Dr. Stadler, and rest assured that you will never be inconvenienced again. The only excuse I can offer for our maintenance department is that the shortage of fuel was not due to their negligence, it was—oh, I realize that you would not know about it and such matters should not take up your invaluable attention—but, you see, the oil shortage last winter was a nation-wide crisis."

"Why? For heaven's sake, don't tell me that those Wyatt fields were the only source of oil in the country!"

"No, no, but the sudden disappearance of a major supply wrought havoc in the entire oil market. So the government had to assume control and impose oil rationing on the country, in order to protect the essential enterprises. I did obtain an unusually large quota for the Institute—and only by the special favor of some very special connections—but I feel abjectly guilty if this proved insufficient. Rest assured that it will not happen again. It is only a temporary emergency. By

next winter, we shall have the Wyatt fields back in production, and conditions will return to normal. Besides, as far as this Institute is concerned, I made all the arrangements to convert our furnaces to coal, and it was to be done next month, only the Stockton Foundry in Colorado closed down suddenly, without notice—they were casting parts for our furnaces, but Andrew Stockton retired, quite unexpectedly, and now we have to wait till his nephew reopens the plant.”

“I see. Well, I trust that you will take care of it among all your other activities.” Dr. Stadler shrugged with annoyance. “It is becoming a little ridiculous—the number of technological ventures that an institution of science has to handle for the government.”

“But, Dr. Stadler—”

“I know, I know, it can’t be avoided. By the way, what is Project X?”

Dr. Ferris’ eyes shot to him swiftly—an odd, bright glance of alertness, that seemed startled, but not frightened. “Where did you hear about Project X, Dr. Stadler?”

“Oh, I heard a couple of your younger boys saying something about it with an air of mystery you’d expect from amateur detectives. They told me it was something very secret.”

“That’s right, Dr. Stadler. It is an extremely secret research project which the government has entrusted to us. And it is of utmost importance that the newspapers get no word about it.”

“What’s the X?”

“Xylophone. Project Xylophone. That is a code name, of course. The work has to do with sound. But I am sure that it would not interest you. It is a purely technological undertaking.”

“Yes, do spare me the story. I have no time for your technological undertakings.”

“May I suggest that it would be advisable to refrain from mentioning the words ‘Project X’ to anyone, Dr. Stadler?”

“Oh, all right, all right. I must say I do not enjoy discussions of that kind.”

“But of course! And I wouldn’t forgive myself if I allowed your time to be taken up by such concerns. Please feel certain that you may safely leave it to me.” He made a movement to rise. “Now if this was the reason you wanted to see me, please believe that I—”

“No,” said Dr. Stadler slowly. “This was not the reason I wanted to see you.”

Dr. Ferris volunteered no questions, no eager offers of service; he remained seated, merely waiting.

Dr. Stadler reached over and made the book slide from the corner to the center of his desk, with a contemptuous flick of one hand. “Will you tell me, please,” he asked, “what is this piece of indecency?”

Dr. Ferris did not glance at the book, but kept his eyes fixed on Stadler’s for an inexplicable moment; then he leaned back and said with an odd smile, “I feel honored that you chose to make such an exception for my sake as reading a popular book. This little piece has sold twenty thousand copies in two weeks.”

“I have read it.”

“And?”

“I expect an explanation.”

“Did you find the text confusing?”

Dr. Stadler looked at him in bewilderment. “Do you realize what theme you chose to treat and in what manner? The style alone, the style, the gutter kind of attitude—for a subject of this nature!”

“Do you think, then, that the content deserved a more dignified form of presentation?” The voice was so innocently smooth that Dr. Stadler could not decide whether this was mockery.

“Do you realize what you’re preaching in this book?”

“Since you do not seem to approve of it, Dr. Stadler, I’d rather have you think that I wrote it innocently.”

This was it, thought Dr. Stadler, this was the incomprehensible element in Ferris’ manner: he had supposed that an indication of his disapproval would be sufficient, but Ferris seemed to remain untouched by it.

“If a drunken lout could find the power to express himself on paper,” said Dr. Stadler, “if he could give voice to his essence—the eternal savage, leering his hatred of the mind—this is the sort of book I would expect him to write. But to see it come from a scientist, under the imprint of this Institute!”

“But, Dr. Stadler, this book was not intended to be read by scientists. It was written for that drunken lout.”

“What do you mean?”

“For the general public.”

“But, good God! The feeblest imbecile should be able to see the glaring contradictions in every one of your statements.”

“Let us put it this way, Dr. Stadler: the man who doesn’t see that, deserves to believe all my statements.”

“But you’ve given the prestige of science to that unspeakable stuff! It was all right for a disreputable mediocrity like Simon Pritchett to drool it as some sort of

woozy mysticism—nobody listened to him. But you’ve made them think it’s science. *Science!* You’ve taken the achievements of the mind to destroy the mind. By what right did you use *my* work to make an unwarranted, preposterous switch into another field, pull an inapplicable metaphor and draw a monstrous generalization out of what is merely a mathematical problem? By what right did you make it sound as if I—I!—gave my sanction to that book?”

Dr. Ferris did nothing, he merely looked at Dr. Stadler calmly; but the calm gave him an air that was almost patronizing. “Now, you see, Dr. Stadler, you’re speaking as if this book were addressed to a thinking audience. If it were, one would have to be concerned with such matters as accuracy, validity, logic and the prestige of science. But it isn’t. It’s addressed to the public. And you have always been first to believe that the public does not think.” He paused, but Dr. Stadler said nothing. “This book may have no philosophical value whatever, but it has a great psychological value.”

“Just what is that?”

“You see, Dr. Stadler, people don’t want to think. And the deeper they get into trouble, the less they want to think. But by some sort of instinct, they feel that they ought to and it makes them feel guilty. So they’ll bless and follow anyone who gives them a justification for not thinking. Anyone who makes a virtue—a highly intellectual virtue—out of what they know to be their sin, their weakness and their guilt.”

“And you propose to pander to that?”

“That is the road to popularity.”

“Why should you seek popularity?”

Dr. Ferris’ eyes moved casually to Dr. Stadler’s face, as if by pure accident. “We are a public institution,” he answered evenly, “supported by public funds.”

“So you tell people that science is a futile fraud which ought to be abolished!”

“That is a conclusion which could be drawn, in logic, from my book. But that is not the conclusion they will draw.”

“And what about the disgrace to the Institute in the eyes of the men of intelligence, wherever such may be left?”

“Why should we worry about them?”

Dr. Stadler could have regarded the sentence as conceivable, had it been uttered with hatred, envy or malice; but the absence of any such emotion, the casual ease of the voice, an ease suggesting a chuckle, hit him like a moment’s glimpse of a realm that could not be taken as part of reality; the thing spreading down to his stomach was cold terror.

“Did you observe the reactions to my book, Dr. Stadler? It was received with considerable favor.”

“Yes—and *that* is what I find impossible to believe.” He had to speak, he had to speak as if this were a civilized discussion, he could not allow himself time to know what it was he had felt for a moment. “I am unable to understand the attention you received in all the reputable academic magazines and how they could permit themselves to discuss your book seriously. If Hugh Akston were around, no academic publication would have dared to treat this as a work admissible into the realm of philosophy.”

“He is not around.”

Dr. Stadler felt that there were words which he was now called upon to pronounce—and he wished he could end this conversation before he discovered what they were.

“On the other hand,” said Dr. Ferris, “the ads for my book—oh, I’m sure you wouldn’t notice such things as ads—quote a letter of high praise which I received from Mr. Wesley Mouch.”

“Who the hell is Mr. Wesley Mouch?”

Dr. Ferris smiled. “In another year, even you won’t ask that question, Dr. Stadler. Let us put it this way: Mr. Mouch is the man who is rationing oil—for the time being.”

“Then I suggest that you stick to your job. Deal with Mr. Mouch and leave him the realm of oil furnaces, but leave the realm of ideas to me.”

“It would be curious to try to formulate the line of demarcation,” said Dr. Ferris, in the tone of an idle academic remark. “But if we’re talking about my book, why, then we’re talking about the realm of public relations.” He turned to point solicitously at the mathematical formulas chalked on the blackboard. “Dr. Stadler, it would be disastrous if you allowed the realm of public relations to distract you from the work which you alone on earth are capable of doing.”

It was said with obsequious deference, and Dr. Stadler could not tell what made him hear in it the sentence: “Stick to your blackboard!” He felt a biting irritation and he switched it against himself, thinking angrily that he had to get rid of these suspicions.

“Public relations?” he said contemptuously. “I don’t see any practical purpose in your book. I don’t see what it’s intended to accomplish.”

“Don’t you?” Dr. Ferris’ eyes flickered briefly to his face; the sparkle of insolence was too swift to be identified with certainty.

“I cannot permit myself to consider certain things as possible in a civilized

society,” Dr. Stadler said sternly.

“That is admirably exact,” said Dr. Ferris cheerfully. “You cannot permit yourself.”

Dr. Ferris rose, being first to indicate that the interview was ended. “Please call for me whenever anything occurs in this Institute to cause you discomfort, Dr. Stadler,” he said. “It is my privilege always to be at your service.”

Knowing that he had to assert his authority, smothering the shameful realization of the sort of substitute he was choosing, Dr. Stadler said imperiously, in a tone of sarcastic rudeness, “The next time I call for you, you’d better do something about that car of yours.”

“Yes, Dr. Stadler. I shall make certain never to be late again, and I beg you to forgive me.” Dr. Ferris responded as if playing a part on cue; as if he were pleased that Dr. Stadler had learned, at last, the modern method of communication. “My car has been causing me a great deal of trouble, it’s falling to pieces, and I had ordered a new one sometime ago, the best one on the market, a Hammond convertible—but Lawrence Hammond went out of business last week, without reason or warning, so now I’m stuck. Those bastards seem to be vanishing somewhere. Something will have to be done about it.”

When Ferris had gone, Dr. Stadler sat at his desk, his shoulders shrinking together, conscious only of a desperate wish not to be seen by anyone. In the fog of the pain which he would not define, there was also the desperate feeling that no one—no one of those he valued—would ever wish to see him again.

He knew the words which he had not uttered. He had not said that he would denounce the book in public and repudiate it in the name of the Institute. He had not said it, because he had been afraid to discover that the threat would leave Ferris unmoved, that Ferris was safe, that the word of Dr. Robert Stadler had no power any longer. And while he told himself that he would consider later the question of making a public protest, he knew that he would not make it.

He picked up the book and let it drop into the wastebasket.

A face came to his mind, suddenly and clearly, as if he were seeing the purity of its every line, a young face he had not permitted himself to recall for years. He thought: No, he has not read this book, he won’t see it, he’s dead, he must have died long ago.... The sharp pain was the shock of discovering simultaneously that this was the man he longed to see more than any other being in the world—and that he had to hope that this man was dead.

He did not know why—when the telephone rang and his secretary told him that Miss Dagny Taggart was on the line—why he seized the receiver with

eagerness and noticed that his hand was trembling. She would never want to see him again, he had thought for over a year. He heard her clear, impersonal voice asking for an appointment to see him. “Yes, Miss Taggart, certainly, yes, indeed.... Monday morning? Yes—look, Miss Taggart, I have an engagement in New York today, I could drop in at your office this afternoon, if you wish.... No, no -no trouble at all, I’ll be delighted.... This afternoon, Miss Taggart, about two—I mean, about four o’clock.”

He had no engagement in New York. He did not give himself time to know what had prompted him to do it. He was smiling eagerly, looking at a patch of sunlight on a distant hill.



Dagny drew a black line across Train Number 93 on the schedule, and felt a moment’s desolate satisfaction in noting that she did it calmly. It was an action which she had had to perform many times in the last six months. It had been hard, at first; it was becoming easier. The day would come, she thought, when she would be able to deliver that death stroke even without the small salute of an effort. Train Number 93 was a freight that had earned its living by carrying supplies to Hammondsville, Colorado.

She knew what steps would come next: first, the death of the special freights—then the shrinking in the number of boxcars for Hammondsville, attached, like poor relatives, to the rear end of freights bound for other towns—then the gradual cutting of the stops at Hammondsville Station from the schedules of the passenger trains—then the day when she would strike Hammondsville, Colorado, off the map. That had been the progression of Wyatt Junction and of the town called Stockton.

She knew—once word was received that Lawrence Hammond had retired—that it was useless to wait, to hope and to wonder whether his cousin, his lawyer or a committee of local citizens would reopen the plant. She knew it was time to start cutting the schedules.

It had lasted less than six months after Ellis Wyatt had gone—that period which a columnist had gleefully called “the field day of the little fellow.” Every oil operator in the country, who owned three wells and whined that Ellis Wyatt left him no chance of livelihood, had rushed to fill the hole which Wyatt had left wide open. They formed leagues, cooperatives, associations; they pooled their

resources and their letter-heads. "The little fellow's day in the sun," the columnist had said. Their sun had been the flames that twisted through the derricks of Wyatt Oil. In its glare, they made the kind of fortunes they had dreamed about, fortunes requiring no competence or effort. Then their biggest customers, such as power companies, who drank oil by the trainful and would make no allowances for human frailty, began to convert to coal -and the smaller customers, who were more tolerant, began to go out of business—the boys in Washington imposed rationing on oil and an emergency tax on employers to support the unemployed oil field workers—then a few of the big oil companies closed down—then the little fellows in the sun discovered that a drilling bit which had cost a hundred dollars, now cost them five hundred, there being no market for oil field equipment, and the suppliers having to earn on one drill what they had earned on five, or perish—then the pipe lines began to close, there being no one able to pay for their upkeep—then the railroads were granted permission to raise their freight rates, there being little oil to carry and the cost of running tank trains having crushed two small lines out of existence—and when the sun went down, they saw that the operating costs, which had once permitted them to exist on their sixty-acre fields, had been made possible by the miles of Wyatt's hillside and had gone in the same coils of smoke. Not until their fortunes had vanished and their pumps had stopped, did the little fellows realize that no business in the country could afford to buy oil at the price it would now take them to produce it. Then the boys in Washington granted subsidies to the oil operators, but not all of the oil operators had friends in Washington, and there followed a situation which no one cared to examine too closely or to discuss.

Andrew Stockton had been in the sort of position which most of the businessmen envied. The rush to convert to coal had descended upon his shoulders like a weight of gold: he had kept his plant working around the clock, running a race with next winter's blizzards, casting parts for coal-burning stoves and furnaces. There were not many dependable foundries left; he had become one of the main pillars supporting the cellars and kitchens of the country. The pillar collapsed without warning. Andrew Stockton announced that he was retiring, closed his plant and vanished. He left no word on what he wished to be done with the plant or whether his relatives had the right to reopen it.

There still were cars on the roads of the country, but they moved like travelers in the desert, who ride past the warning skeletons of horses bleached by the sun: they moved past the skeletons of cars that had collapsed on duty and had been left in the ditches by the side of the road. People were not buying cars any

longer, and the automobile factories were closing. But there were men still able to get oil, by means of friendships that nobody cared to question. These men bought cars at any price demanded. Lights flooded the mountains of Colorado from the great windows of the plant, where the assembly belts of Lawrence Hammond poured trucks and cars to the sidings of Taggart Transcontinental. The word that Lawrence Hammond had retired came when least expected, brief and sudden like the single stroke of a bell in a heavy stillness. A committee of local citizens was now broadcasting appeals on the radio, begging Lawrence Hammond, wherever he was, to give them permission to reopen his plant. There was no answer.

She had screamed when Ellis Wyatt went; she had gasped when Andrew Stockton retired; when she heard that Lawrence Hammond had quit, she asked impassively, "Who's next?"

"No, Miss Taggart, I can't explain it," the sister of Andrew Stockton had told her on her last trip to Colorado, two months ago. "He never said a word to me and I don't even know whether he's dead or living, same as Ellis Wyatt. No, nothing special had happened the day before he quit. I remember only that some man came to see him on that last evening. A stranger I'd never seen before. They talked late into the night—when I went to sleep, the light was still burning in Andrew's study."

People were silent in the towns of Colorado. Dagny had seen the way they walked in the streets, past their small drugstores, hardware stores and grocery markets: as if they hoped that the motions of their jobs would save them from looking ahead at the future. She, too, had walked through those streets, trying not to lift her head, not to see the ledges of sooted rock and twisted steel, which had been the Wyatt oil fields. They could be seen from many of the towns; when she had looked ahead, she had seen them in the distance.

One well, on the crest of the hill, was still burning. Nobody had been able to extinguish it. She had seen it from the streets: a spurt of fire twisting convulsively against the sky, as if trying to tear loose. She had seen it at night, across the distance of a hundred clear, black miles, from the window of a train: a small, violent flame, waving in the wind. People called it Wyatt's Torch.

The longest train on the John Galt Line had forty cars; the fastest ran at fifty miles an hour. The engines had to be spared: they were coal-burning engines, long past their age of retirement. Jim obtained the oil for the Diesels that pulled the Comet and a few of their transcontinental freights. The only source of fuel she could count on and deal with was Ken Danagger of Danagger Coal in

Pennsylvania.

Empty trains clattered through the four states that were tied, as neighbors, to the throat of Colorado. They carried a few carloads of sheep, some corn, some melons and an occasional farmer with an overdressed family, who had friends in Washington. Jim had obtained a subsidy from Washington for every train that was run, not as a profit-making carrier, but as a service of “public equality.”

It took every scrap of her energy to keep trains running through the sections where they were still needed, in the areas that were still producing. But on the balance sheets of Taggart Transcontinental, the checks of Jim’s subsidies for empty trains bore larger figures than the profit brought by the best freight train of the busiest industrial division.

Jim boasted that this had been the most prosperous six months in Taggart history. Listed as profit, on the glossy pages of his report to the stockholders, was the money he had not earned—the subsidies for empty trains; and the money he did not own—the sums that should have gone to pay the interest and the retirement of Taggart bonds, the debt which, by the will of Wesley Mouch, he had been permitted not to pay. He boasted about the greater volume of freight carried by Taggart trains in Arizona—where Dan Conway had closed the last of the Phoenix-Durango and retired; and in Minnesota—where Paul Larkin was shipping iron ore by rail, and the last of the ore boats on the Great Lakes had gone out of existence.

“You have always considered money-making as such an important virtue,” Jim had said to her with an odd half-smile. “Well, it seems to me that I’m better at it than you are.”

Nobody professed to understand the question of the frozen railroad bonds; perhaps, because everybody understood it too well. At first, there had been signs of a panic among the bondholders and of a dangerous indignation among the public. Then, Wesley Mouch had issued another directive, which ruled that people could get their bonds “defrozen” upon a plea of “essential need”: the government would purchase the bonds, if it found the proof of the need satisfactory. There were three questions that no one answered or asked: “What constituted proof?” “What constituted need?” “Essential—to whom?”

Then it became bad manners to discuss why one man received the grant defreezing his money, while another had been refused. People turned away in mouth-pinched silence, if anybody asked a “why?” One was supposed to describe, not to explain, to catalogue facts, not to evaluate them: Mr. Smith had been defrozen, Mr. Jones had not; that was all. And when Mr. Jones committed

suicide, people said, “Well, I don’t know, if he’d really needed his money, the government would have given it to him, but some men are just greedy.”

One was not supposed to speak about the men who, having been refused, sold their bonds for one-third of the value to other men who possessed needs which, miraculously, made thirty-three frozen cents melt into a whole dollar; or about a new profession practiced by bright young boys just out of college, who called themselves “defreezers” and offered their services “to help you draft your application in the proper modern terms.” The boys had friends in Washington.

Looking at the Taggart rail from the platform of some country station, she had found herself feeling, not the brilliant pride she had once felt, but a foggy, guilty shame, as if some foul kind of rust had grown on the metal, and worse: as if the rust had a tinge of blood. But then, in the concourse of the Terminal, she looked at the statue of Nat Taggart and thought: It was your rail, you made it, you fought for it, you were not stopped by fear or by loathing—I won’t surrender it to the men of blood and rust—and I’m the only one left to guard it.

She had not given up her quest for the man who invented the motor. It was the only part of her work that made her able to bear the rest. It was the only goal in sight that gave meaning to her struggle. There were times when she wondered why she wanted to rebuild that motor. What for?—some voice seemed to ask her. Because I’m still alive, she answered. But her quest had remained futile. Her two engineers had found nothing in Wisconsin. She had sent them to search through the country for men who had worked for Twentieth Century, to learn the name of the inventor. They had learned nothing. She had sent them to search through the files of the Patent Office; no patent for the motor had ever been registered.

The only remnant of her personal quest was the stub of the cigarette with the dollar sign. She had forgotten it, until a recent evening, when she had found it in a drawer of her desk and given it to her friend at the cigar counter of the concourse. The old man had been very astonished, as he examined the stub, holding it cautiously between two fingers; he had never heard of such a brand and wondered how he could have missed it. “Was it of good quality, Miss Taggart?” “The best I’ve ever smoked.” He had shaken his head, puzzled. He had promised to discover where those cigarettes were made and to get her a carton.

She had tried to find a scientist able to attempt the reconstruction of the motor. She had interviewed the men recommended to her as the best in their field. The first one, after studying the remnants of the motor and of the manuscript, had

declared, in the tone of a drill sergeant, that the thing could not work, had never worked and he would prove that no such motor could ever be made to work. The second one had drawled, in the tone of an answer to a boring imposition, that he did not know whether it could be done or not and did not care to find out. The third had said, his voice belligerently insolent, that he would attempt the task on a ten-year contract at twenty-five thousand dollars a year—"After all, Miss Taggart, if you expect to make huge profits on that motor, it's you who should pay for the gamble of my time." The fourth, who was the youngest, had looked at her silently for a moment and the lines of his face had slithered from blankness into a suggestion of contempt. "You know, Miss Taggart, I don't think that such a motor should ever be made, even if somebody did learn how to make it. It would be so superior to anything we've got that it would be unfair to lesser scientists, because it would leave no field for their achievements and abilities. I don't think that the strong should have the right to wound the self-esteem of the weak." She had ordered him out of her office, and had sat in incredulous horror before the fact that the most vicious statement she had ever heard had been uttered in a tone of moral righteousness.

The decision to speak to Dr. Robert Stadler had been her last recourse.

She had forced herself to call him, against the resistance of some immovable point within her that felt like brakes slammed tight. She had argued against herself. She had thought: I deal with men like Jim and Orren Boyle—his guilt is less than theirs—why can't I speak to him? She had found no answer, only a stubborn sense of reluctance, only the feeling that of all the men on earth, Dr. Robert Stadler was the one she must not call.

As she sat at her desk, over the schedules of the John Gait Line, waiting for Dr. Stadler to come, she wondered why no first-rate talent had risen in the field of science for years. She was unable to look for an answer. She was looking at the black line which was the corpse of Train Number 93 on the schedule before her.

A train has the two great attributes of life, she thought, motion and purpose; this had been like a living entity, but now it was only a number of dead freight cars and engines. Don't give yourself time to feel, she thought, dismember the carcass as fast as possible, the engines are needed all over the system, Ken Danagger in Pennsylvania needs trains, more trains, if only—

"Dr. Robert Stadler," said the voice of the interoffice communicator on her desk.

He came in, smiling; the smile seemed to underscore his words: "Miss

Taggart, would you care to believe how helplessly glad I am to see you again?"

She did not smile, she looked gravely courteous as she answered, "It was very kind of you to come here." She bowed, her slender figure standing tautly straight but for the slow, formal movement of her head.

"What if I confessed that all I needed was some plausible excuse in order to come? Would it astonish you?"

"I would try not to overtax your courtesy." She did not smile. "Please sit down, Dr. Stadler."

He looked brightly around him. "I've never seen the office of a railroad executive. I didn't know it would be so ... so solemn a place. Is that in the nature of the job?"

"The matter on which I'd like to ask your advice is far removed from the field of your interests, Dr. Stadler. You may think it odd that I should call on you. Please allow me to explain my reason."

"The fact that you wished to call on me is a fully sufficient reason. If I can be of any service to you, any service whatever, I don't know what would please me more at this moment." His smile had an attractive quality, the smile of a man of the world who used it, not to cover his words, but to stress the audacity of expressing a sincere emotion.

"My problem is a matter of technology," she said, in the clear, expressionless tone of a young mechanic discussing a difficult assignment. "I fully realize your contempt for that branch of science. I do not expect you to solve my problem—it is not the kind of work which you do or care about. I should like only to submit the problem to you, and then I'll have just two questions to ask you. I had to call on you, because it is a matter that involves someone's mind, a very great mind, and"—she spoke impersonally, in the manner of rendering exact justice—"and you are the only great mind left in this field."

She could not tell why her words hit him as they did. She saw the stillness of his face, the sudden earnestness of the eyes, a strange earnestness that seemed eager and almost pleading, then she heard his voice come gravely, as if from under the pressure of some emotion that made it sound simple and humble:

"What is your problem, Miss Taggart?"

She told him about the motor and the place where she had found it; she told him that it had proved impossible to learn the name of the inventor; she did not mention the details of her quest. She handed him photographs of the motor and the remnant of the manuscript.

She watched him as he read. She saw the professional assurance in the swift,

scanning motion of his eyes, at first, then the pause, then the growing intentness, then a movement of his lips which, from another man, would have been a whistle or a gasp. She saw him stop for long minutes and look off, as if his mind were racing over countless sudden trails, trying to follow them all—she saw him leaf back through the pages, then stop, then force himself to read on, as if he were torn between his eagerness to continue and his eagerness to seize all the possibilities breaking open before his vision. She saw his silent excitement, she knew that he had forgotten her office, her existence, everything but the sight of an achievement—and in tribute to his being capable of such reaction, she wished it were possible for her to like Dr. Robert Stadler.

They had been silent for over an hour, when he finished and looked up at her. “But this is extraordinary!” he said in the joyous, astonished tone of announcing some news she had not expected.

She wished she could smile in answer and grant him the comradeship of a joy celebrated together, but she merely nodded and said coldly, “Yes.”

“But, Miss Taggart, this is tremendous!”

“Yes. ”

“Did you say it’s a matter of technology? It’s more, much, much more than that. The pages where he writes about his converter—you can see what premise he’s speaking from. He arrived at some new concept of energy. He discarded all our standard assumptions, according to which his motor would have been impossible. He formulated a new premise of his own and he solved the secret of converting static energy into kinetic power. Do you know what *that* means? Do you realize what a feat of pure, abstract science he had to perform before he could make his motor?”

“Who?” she asked quietly.

“I beg your pardon?”

“That was the first of the two questions I wanted to ask you, Dr. Stadler: can you think of any young scientist you might have known ten years ago, who would have been able to do this?”

He paused, astonished; he had not had time to wonder about that question. “No,” he said slowly, frowning, “no, I can’t think of anyone. ... And that’s odd ... because an ability of this kind couldn’t have passed unnoticed anywhere ... somebody would have called him to my attention ... they always sent promising young physicists to me. ... Did you say you found this in the research laboratory of a plain, commercial motor factory?”

“Yes.”

“That’s odd. What was he doing in such a place?”

“Designing a motor.”

“That’s what I mean. A man with the genius of a great scientist, who chose to be a commercial inventor? I find it outrageous. He wanted a motor, and he quietly performed a major revolution in the science of energy, just as a means to an end, and he didn’t bother to publish his findings, but went right on making his motor. Why did he want to waste his mind on practical appliances?”

“Perhaps because he liked living on this earth,” she said involuntarily.

“I beg your pardon?”

“No, I ... I’m sorry, Dr. Stadler. I did not intend to discuss any ... irrelevant subject.”

He was looking off, pursuing his own course of thought. “Why didn’t he come to me? Why wasn’t he in some great scientific establishment where he belonged? If he had the brains to achieve this, surely he had the brains to know the importance of what he had done. Why didn’t he publish a paper on his definition of energy? I can see the general direction he’d taken, but God damn him!—the most important pages are missing, the statement isn’t here! Surely somebody around him should have known enough to announce his work to the whole world of science. Why didn’t they? How could they abandon, just abandon, a thing of this kind?”

“These are the questions to which I found no answers.”

“And besides, from the purely practical aspect, why was that motor left in a junk pile? You’d think any greedy fool of an industrialist would have grabbed it in order to make a fortune. No intelligence was needed to see its commercial value.”

She smiled for the first time—a smile ugly with bitterness; she said nothing.

“You found it impossible to trace the inventor?” he asked.

“Completely impossible—so far.”

“Do you think that he is still alive?”

“I have reason to think that he is. But I can’t be sure.”

“Suppose I tried to advertise for him?”

“No. Don’t.”

“But if I were to place ads in scientific publications and have Dr. Ferris”—he stopped; he saw her glance at him as swiftly as he glanced at her; she said nothing, but she held his glance; he looked away and finished the sentence coldly and firmly—“and have Dr. Ferris broadcast on the radio that *I* wish to see him, would he refuse to come?”

“Yes, Dr. Stadler, I think he would refuse.”

He was not looking at her. She saw the faint tightening of his facial muscles and, simultaneously, the look of something going slack in the lines of his face; she could not tell what sort of light was dying within him nor what made her think of the death of a light.

He tossed the manuscript down on the desk with a casual, contemptuous movement of his wrist. “Those men who do not mind being practical enough to sell their brains for money, ought to acquire a little knowledge of the conditions of practical reality.”

He looked at her with a touch of defiance, as if waiting for an angry answer. But her answer was worse than anger: her face remained expressionless, as if the truth or falsehood of his convictions were of no concern to her any longer. She said politely, “The second question I wanted to ask you was whether you would be kind enough to tell me the name of any physicist you know who, in your judgment, would possess the ability to attempt the reconstruction of this motor.”

He looked at her and chuckled; it was a sound of pain. “Have you been tortured by it, too, Miss Taggart? By the impossibility of finding any sort of intelligence anywhere?”

“I have interviewed some physicists who were highly recommended to me and I have found them to be hopeless.”

He leaned forward eagerly. “Miss Taggart,” he asked, “did you call on me because you trusted the integrity of my scientific judgment?” The question was a naked plea.

“Yes,” she answered evenly, “I trusted the integrity of your scientific judgment.”

He leaned back; he looked as if some hidden smile were smoothing the tension away from his face. “I wish I could help you,” he said, as to a comrade. “I most selfishly wish I could help you, because, you see, this has been my hardest problem—trying to find men of talent for my own staff. Talent, hell! I’d be satisfied with just a semblance of promise—but the men they send me couldn’t be honestly said to possess the potentiality of developing into decent garage mechanics. I don’t know whether I am getting older and more demanding, or whether the human race is degenerating, but the world didn’t seem to be so barren of intelligence in my youth. Today, if you saw the kind of men I’ve had to interview, you’d—”

He stopped abruptly, as if at a sudden recollection. He remained silent; he seemed to be considering something he knew, but did not wish to tell her; she

became certain of it, when he concluded brusquely, in that tone of resentment which conceals an evasion, “No, I don’t know anyone I’d care to recommend to you.”

“This was all I wanted to ask you, Dr. Stadler,” she said. “Thank you for giving me your time.”

He sat silently still for a moment, as if he could not bring himself to leave.

“Miss Taggart,” he asked, “could you show me the actual motor itself?”

She looked at him, astonished. “Why, yes ... if you wish. But it’s in an underground vault, down in our Terminal tunnels.”

“I don’t mind, if you wouldn’t mind taking me down there. I have no special motive. It’s only my personal curiosity. I would like to see it—that’s all.”

When they stood in the granite vault, over a glass case containing a shape of broken metal, he took off his hat with a slow, absent movement—and she could not tell whether it was the routine gesture of remembering that he was in a room with a lady, or the gesture of baring one’s head over a coffin.

They stood in silence, in the glare of a single light refracted from the glass surface to their faces. Train wheels were clicking in the distance, and it seemed at times as if a sudden, sharper jolt of vibration were about to awaken an answer from the corpse in the glass case.

“It’s so wonderful,” said Dr. Stadler, his voice low. “It’s so wonderful to see a great, new, crucial idea which is not mine!”

She looked at him, wishing she could believe that she understood him correctly. He spoke, in passionate sincerity, discarding convention, discarding concern for whether it was proper to let her hear the confession of his pain, seeing nothing but the face of a woman who was able to understand:

“Miss Taggart, do you know the hallmark of the second-rater? It’s resentment of another man’s achievement. Those touchy mediocrities who sit trembling lest someone’s work prove greater than their own—they have no inkling of the loneliness that comes when you reach the top. The loneliness for an equal—for a mind to respect and an achievement to admire. They bare their teeth at you from out of their rat holes, thinking that you take pleasure in letting your brilliance dim them—while you’d give a year of your life to see a flicker of talent anywhere among them. They envy achievement, and their dream of greatness is a world where all men have become their acknowledged inferiors. They don’t know that that dream is the infallible proof of mediocrity, because that sort of world is what the man of achievement would not be able to bear. They have no way of knowing what he feels when surrounded by inferiors—hatred? no, not

hatred, but boredom—the terrible, hopeless, draining, paralyzing boredom. Of what account are praise and adulation from men whom you don't respect? Have you ever felt the longing for someone you could admire? For something, not to look down at, but up to?"

"I've felt it all my life," she said. It was an answer she could not refuse him.

"I know," he said—and there was beauty in the impersonal gentleness of his voice. "I knew it the first time I spoke to you. That was why I came today—" He stopped for the briefest instant, but she did not answer the appeal and he finished with the same quiet gentleness, "Well, that was why I wanted to see the motor."

"I understand," she said softly; the tone of her voice was the only form of acknowledgment she could grant him.

"Miss Taggart," he said, his eyes lowered, looking at the glass case, "I know a man who might be able to undertake the reconstruction of that motor. He would not work for me—so he is probably the kind of man you want."

But by the time he raised his head—and before he saw the look of admiration in her eyes, the open look he had begged for, the look of forgiveness—he destroyed his single moment's atonement by adding in a voice of drawing-room sarcasm, "Apparently, the young man had no desire to work for the good of society or the welfare of science. He told me that he would not take a government job. I presume he wanted the bigger salary he could hope to obtain from a private employer."

He turned away, not to see the look that was fading from her face, not to let himself know its meaning. "Yes," she said, her voice hard, "he is probably the kind of man I want."

"He's a young physicist from the Utah Institute of Technology," he said dryly. "His name is Quentin Daniels. A friend of mine sent him to me a few months ago. He came to see me, but he would not take the job I offered. I wanted him on my staff. He had the mind of a scientist. I don't know whether he can succeed with your motor, but at least he has the ability to attempt it. I believe you can still reach him at the Utah Institute of Technology. I don't know what he's doing there now—they closed the Institute a year ago."

"Thank you, Dr. Stadler. I shall get in touch with him."

"If ... if you want me to, I'll be glad to help him with the theoretical part of it. I'm going to do some work myself, starting from the leads of that manuscript. I'd like to find the cardinal secret of energy that its author had found. It's his basic principle that we must discover. If we succeed, Mr. Daniels may finish the job, as far as your motor is concerned."

“I will appreciate any help you may care to give me, Dr. Stadler.”

They walked silently through the dead tunnels of the Terminal, down the ties of a rusted track under a string of blue lights, to the distant glow of the platforms.

At the mouth of the tunnel, they saw a man kneeling on the track, hammering at a switch with the unrhythmical exasperation of uncertainty. Another man stood watching him impatiently.

“Well, what’s the matter with the damn thing?” asked the watcher.

“Don’t know.”

“You’ve been at it for an hour.”

“Yeah.”

“How long is it going to take?”

“Who is John Galt?”

Dr. Stadler winced. They had gone past the men, when he said, “I don’t like that expression.”

“I don’t, either,” she answered.

“Where did it come from?”

“Nobody knows.”

They were silent, then he said, “I knew a John Galt once. Only he died long ago.”

“Who was he?”

“I used to think that he was still alive. But now I’m certain that he must have died. He had such a mind that, had he lived, the whole world would have been talking of him by now.”

“But the whole world is talking of him.”

He stopped still. “Yes ...” he said slowly, staring at a thought that had never struck him before, “yes ... Why?” The word was heavy with the sound of terror.

“Who was he, Dr. Stadler?”

“Why are they talking of him?”

“Who was he?”

He shook his head with a shudder and said sharply, “It’s just a coincidence. The name is not uncommon at all. It’s a meaningless coincidence. It has no connection with the man I knew. That man is dead.”

He did not permit himself to know the full meaning of the words he added:

“He has to be dead.”

The order that lay on his desk was marked “Confidential ... Emergency ... Priority ... Essential need certified by office of Top Co-ordinator ... for the account of Project X”—and demanded that he sell ten thousand tons of Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute.

Rearden read it and glanced up at the superintendent of his mills who stood before him without moving. The superintendent had come in and put the order down on his desk without a word.

“I thought you’d want to see it,” he said, in answer to Rearden’s glance.

Rearden pressed a button, summoning Miss Ives. He handed the order to her and said, “Send this back to wherever it came from. Tell them that I will not sell any Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute.”

Gwen Ives and the superintendent looked at him, at each other and back at him again; what he saw in their eyes was congratulation.

“Yes, Mr. Rearden,” Gwen Ives said formally, taking the slip as if it were any other kind of business paper. She bowed and left the room. The superintendent followed.

Rearden smiled faintly, in greeting to what they felt. He felt nothing about that paper or its possible consequences.

By a sort of inner convulsion—which had been like tearing a plug out to cut off the current of his emotions—he had told himself six months ago: Act first, keep the mills going, feel later. It had made him able to watch dispassionately the working of the Fair Share Law.

Nobody had known how that law was to be observed. First, he had been told that he could not produce Rearden Metal in an amount greater than the tonnage of the best special alloy, other than steel, produced by Orren Boyle. But Orren Boyle’s best special alloy was some cracking mixture that no one cared to buy. Then he had been told that he could produce Rearden Metal in the amount that Orren Boyle *could have* produced, if he could have produced it. Nobody had known how this was to be determined. Somebody in Washington had announced a figure, naming a number of tons per year, giving no reasons. Everybody had let it go at that.

He had not known how to give every consumer who demanded it an equal share of Rearden Metal. The waiting list of orders could not be filled in three years, even had he been permitted to work at full capacity. New orders were coming in daily. They were not orders any longer, in the old, honorable sense of trade; they were demands. The law provided that he could be sued by any consumer who failed to receive his fair share of Rearden Metal.

Nobody had known how to determine what constituted a fair share of what amount. Then a bright young boy just out of college had been sent to him from Washington, as Deputy Director of Distribution. After many telephone conferences with the capital, the boy announced that customers would get five hundred tons of the Metal each, in the order of the dates of their applications. Nobody had argued against his figure. There was no way to form an argument; the figure could have been one pound or one million tons, with the same validity. The boy had established an office at the Rearden mills, where four girls took applications for shares of Rearden Metal. At the present rate of the mills' production, the applications extended well into the next century.

Five hundred tons of Rearden Metal could not provide three miles of rail for Taggart Transcontinental; it could not provide the bracing for one of Ken Danagger's coal mines. The largest industries, Rearden's best customers, were denied the use of his Metal. But golf clubs made of Rearden Metal were suddenly appearing on the market, as well as coffee pots, garden tools and bathroom faucets. Ken Danagger, who had seen the value of the Metal and had dared to order it against a fury of public opinion, was not permitted to obtain it; his order had been left unfilled, cut off without warning by the new laws. Mr. Mowen, who had betrayed Taggart Transcontinental in its most dangerous hour, was now making switches of Rearden Metal and selling them to the Atlantic Southern. Rearden looked on, his emotions plugged out.

He turned away, without a word, when anybody mentioned to him what everybody knew: the quick fortunes that were being made on Rearden Metal. "Well, no," people said in drawing rooms, "you musn't call it a black market, because it isn't, really. Nobody is selling the *Metal* illegally. They're just selling their right to it. Not selling really, just pooling their shares." He did not want to know the insect intricacy of the deals through which the "shares" were sold and pooled—nor how a manufacturer in Virginia had produced, in two months, five thousand tons of castings made of Rearden Metal—nor what man in Washington was that manufacturer's unlisted partner. He knew that their profit on a ton of Rearden Metal was five times larger than his own. He said nothing. Everybody had a right to the Metal, except himself.

The young boy from Washington—whom the steel workers had nicknamed the Wet Nurse—hung around Rearden with a primitive, astonished curiosity which, incredibly, was a form of admiration. Rearden watched him with disgusted amusement. The boy had no inkling of any concept of morality; it had been bred out of him by his college; this had left him an odd frankness, naive

and cynical at once, like the innocence of a savage.

“You despise me, Mr. Rearden,” he had declared once, suddenly and without any resentment. “That’s impractical.”

“Why is it impractical?” Rearden had asked.

The boy had looked puzzled and had found no answer. He never had an answer to any “why?” He spoke in flat assertions. He would say about people, “He’s old-fashioned,” “He’s unreconstructed,” “He’s unadjusted,” without hesitation or explanation; he would also say, while being a graduate in metallurgy, “Iron smelting, I think, seems to require a high temperature.” He uttered nothing but uncertain opinions about physical nature—and nothing but categorical imperatives about men.

“Mr. Rearden,” he had said once, “if you feel you’d like to hand out more of the Metal to friends of yours—I mean, in bigger hauls—it could be arranged, you know. Why don’t we apply for a special permission on the ground of essential need? I’ve got a few friends in Washington. Your friends are pretty important people, big businessmen, so it wouldn’t be difficult to get away with the essential need dodge. Of course, there would be a few expenses. For things in Washington. You know how it is, things always occasion expenses.”

“What things?”

“You understand what I mean.”

“No,” Rearden had said, “I don’t. Why don’t you explain it to me?”

The boy had looked at him uncertainly, weighed it in his mind, then come out with: “It’s bad psychology.”

“What is?”

“You know, Mr. Rearden, it’s not necessary to use such words as that.”

“As what?”

“Words are relative. They’re only symbols. If we don’t use ugly symbols, we won’t have any ugliness. Why do you want me to say things one way, when I’ve already said them another?”

“Which way do I want you to say them?”

“Why do you want me to?”

“For the same reason that you don’t.”

The boy had remained silent for a moment, then had said, “You know, Mr. Rearden, there are no absolute standards. We can’t go by rigid principles, we’ve got to be flexible, we’ve got to adjust to the reality of the day and act on the expediency of the moment.”

“Run along, punk. Go and try to pour a ton of steel without rigid principles, on

the expediency of the moment.”

A strange sense, which was almost a sense of style, made Rearden feel contempt for the boy, but no resentment. The boy seemed to fit the spirit of the events around them. It was as if they were being carried back across a long span of centuries to the age where the boy had belonged, but he, Rearden, had not. Instead of building new furnaces, thought Rearden, he was now running a losing race to keep the old ones going; instead of starting new ventures, new research, new experiments in the use of Rearden Metal, he was spending the whole of his energy on a quest for sources of iron ore: like the men at the dawn of the Iron Age—he thought—but with less hope.

He tried to avoid these thoughts. He had to stand on guard against his own feeling—as if some part of him had become a stranger that had to be kept numb, and his will had to be its constant, watchful anesthetic. That part was an unknown of which he knew only that he must never see its root and never give it voice. He had lived through one dangerous moment which he could not allow to return.

It was the moment when—alone in his office, on a winter evening, held paralyzed by a newspaper spread on his desk with a long column of directives on the front page—he had heard on the radio the news of Ellis Wyatt’s flaming oil fields. Then, his first reaction—before any thought of the future, any sense of disaster, any shock, terror or protest—had been to burst out laughing. He had laughed in triumph, in deliverance, in a spurting, living exultation—and the words which he had not pronounced, but felt, were: God bless you, Ellis, whatever you’re doing!

When he had grasped the implications of his laughter, he had known that he was now condemned to constant vigilance against himself. Like the survivor of a heart attack, he knew that he had had a warning and that he carried within him a danger that could strike him at any moment.

He had held it off, since then. He had kept an even, cautious, severely controlled pace in his inner steps. But it had come close to him for a moment, once again. When he had looked at the order of the State Science Institute on his desk, it had seemed to him that the glow moving over the paper did not come from the furnaces outside, but from the flames of a burning oil field.

“Mr. Rearden,” said the Wet Nurse, when he heard about the rejected order, “you shouldn’t have done that.”

“Why not?”

“There’s going to be trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“It’s a government order. You can’t reject a government order.”

“Why can’t I?”

“It’s an Essential Need project, and secret, too. It’s very important.”

“What kind of a project is it?”

“I don’t know. It’s secret.”

“Then how do you know it’s important?”

“It said so.”

“Who said so?”

“You can’t doubt such a thing as that, Mr. Rearden!”

“Why can’t I?”

“But you can’t.”

“If I can’t, then that would make it an absolute and you said there aren’t any absolutes.”

“That’s different.”

“How is it different?”

“It’s the government.”

“You mean, there aren’t any absolutes except the government?”

“I mean, if they say it’s important, then it is.”

“Why?”

“I don’t want you to get in trouble, Mr. Rearden, and you’re going to, sure as hell. You ask too many why’s. Now why do you do that?”

Rearden glanced at him and chuckled. The boy noticed his own words and grinned sheepishly, but he looked unhappy.

The man who came to see Rearden a week later was youngish and slenderish, but neither as young nor as slender as he tried to make himself appear. He wore civilian clothes and the leather leggings of a traffic cop. Rearden could not quite get it clear whether he came from the State Science Institute or from Washington.

“I understand that you refused to sell metal to the State Science Institute, Mr. Rearden,” he said in a soft, confidential tone of voice.

“That’s right,” said Rearden.

“But wouldn’t that constitute a willful disobedience of the law?”

“It’s for you to interpret.”

“May I ask your reason?”

“My reason is of no interest to you.”

“Oh, but of course it is! We are not your enemies, Mr. Rearden. We want to

be fair to you. You mustn't be afraid of the fact that you are a big industrialist. We won't hold it against you. We actually want to be as fair to you as to the lowest day laborer. We would like to know your reason."

"Print my refusal in the newspapers, and any reader will tell you my reason. It appeared in all the newspapers a little over a year ago."

"Oh, no, no, no! Why talk of newspapers? Can't we settle this as a friendly, private matter?"

"That's up to you."

"We don't want this in the newspapers."

"No?"

"No. We wouldn't want to hurt you."

Rearden glanced at him and asked, "Why does the State Science Institute need ten thousand tons of metal? What is Project X?"

"Oh, that? It's a very important project of scientific research, an undertaking of great social value that may prove of inestimable public benefit, but, unfortunately, the regulations of top policy do not permit me to tell you its nature in fuller detail."

"You know," said Rearden, "I could tell you—as my reason—that I do not wish to sell my Metal to those whose purpose is kept secret from me. I created that Metal. It is my moral responsibility to know for what purpose I permit it to be used."

"Oh, but you don't have to worry about that, Mr. Rearden! We relieve you of the responsibility."

"Suppose I don't wish to be relieved of it?"

"But . . . but that is an old-fashioned and . . . and purely theoretical attitude."

"I said I could name it as my reason. But I won't—because, in this case, I have another, inclusive reason. I would not sell any Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute for any purpose whatever, good or bad, secret or open."

"But why?"

"Listen," said Rearden slowly, "there might be some sort of justification for the savage societies in which a man had to expect that enemies could murder him at any moment and had to defend himself as best he could. But there can be no justification for a society in which a man is expected to manufacture the weapons for his own murderers."

"I don't think it's advisable to use such words, Mr. Rearden. I don't think it's practical to think in such terms. After all, the government cannot—in the pursuit of wide, national policies—take cognizance of your personal grudge against

some one particular institution.”

“Then don’t take cognizance of it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t come asking my reason.”

“But, Mr. Rearden, we cannot let a refusal to obey the law pass unnoticed. What do you expect us to do?”

“Whatever you wish.”

“But this is totally unprecedented. Nobody has ever refused to sell an essential commodity to the government. As a matter of fact, the law does not permit you to refuse to sell your Metal to *any* consumer, let alone the government.”

“Well, why don’t you arrest me, then?”

“Mr. Rearden, this is an amicable discussion. Why speak of such things as arrests?”

“Isn’t that your ultimate argument against me?”

“Why bring it up?”

“Isn’t it implied in every sentence of this discussion?”

“Why name it?”

“Why not?” There was no answer. “Are you trying to hide from me the fact that if it weren’t for that trump card of yours, I wouldn’t have allowed you to enter this office?”

“But I’m not speaking of arrests.”

“I am.”

“I don’t understand you, Mr. Rearden.”

“I am not helping you to pretend that this is any sort of amicable discussion. It isn’t. Now do what you please about it.”

There was a strange look on the man’s face: bewilderment, as if he had no conception of the issue confronting him, and fear, as if he had always had full knowledge of it and had lived in dread of exposure.

Rearden felt a strange excitement; he felt as if he were about to grasp something he had never understood, as if he were on the trail of some discovery still too distant to know, except that it had the most immense importance he had ever glimpsed.

“Mr. Rearden,” said the man, “the government needs your Metal. You have to sell it to us, because surely you realize that the government’s plans cannot be held up by the matter of your consent.”

“A sale,” said Rearden slowly, “requires the seller’s consent.” He got up and walked to the window. “I’ll tell you what you can do.” He pointed to the siding

where ingots of Rearden Metal were being loaded onto freight cars. “There’s Rearden Metal. Drive down there with your trucks—like any other looter, but without his risk, because I won’t shoot you, as you know I can’t—take as much of the Metal as you wish and go. Don’t try to send me payment. I won’t accept it. Don’t print out a check to me. It won’t be cashed. If you want that Metal, you have the guns to seize it. Go ahead.”

“Good God, Mr. Rearden, what would the public think!”

It was an instinctive, involuntary cry. The muscles of Rearden’s face moved briefly in a soundless laughter. Both of them had understood the implications of that cry. Rearden said evenly, in the grave, unstrained tone of finality, “You need my help to make it look like a sale—like a safe, just, moral transaction. I will not help you.”

The man did not argue. He rose to leave. He said only, “You will regret the stand you’ve taken, Mr. Rearden.”

“I don’t think so,” said Rearden.

He knew that the incident was not ended. He knew also that the secrecy of Project X was not the main reason why these people feared to make the issue public. He knew that he felt an odd, joyous, light-hearted self-confidence. He knew that these were the right steps down the trail he had glimpsed.



Dagny lay stretched in an armchair of her living room, her eyes closed. This day had been hard, but she knew that she would see Hank Rearden tonight. The thought of it was like a lever lifting the weight of hours of senseless ugliness away from her.

She lay still, content to rest with the single purpose of waiting quietly for the sound of the key in the lock. He had not telephoned her, but she had heard that he was in New York today for a conference with producers of copper, and he never left the city till next morning, nor spent a night in New York that was not hers. She liked to wait for him. She needed a span of time as a bridge between her days and his nights.

The hours ahead, like all her nights with him, would be added, she thought, to that savings account of one’s life where moments of time are stored in the pride of having been lived. The only pride of her workday was not that it had been lived, but that it had been survived. It was wrong, she thought, it was viciously

wrong that one should ever be forced to say that about any hour of one's life. But she could not think of it now. She was thinking of him, of the struggle she had watched through the months behind them, his struggle for deliverance; she had known that she could help him win, but must help him in every way except in words.

She thought of the evening last winter when he came in, took a small package from his pocket and held it out to her, saying, "I want you to have it." She opened it and stared in incredulous bewilderment at a pendant made of a single pear-shaped ruby that spurted a violent fire on the white satin of the jeweler's box. It was a famous stone, which only a dozen men in the world could properly afford to purchase; he was not one of them.

"Hank . . . why?"

"No special reason. I just wanted to see you wear it."

"Oh, no, not a thing of this kind! Why waste it? I go so rarely to occasions where one has to dress. When would I ever wear it?"

He looked at her, his glance moving slowly from her legs to her face. "I'll show you," he said.

He led her to the bedroom, he took off her clothes, without a word, in the manner of an owner undressing a person whose consent is not required. He clasped the pendant on her shoulders. She stood naked, the stone between her breasts, like a sparkling drop of blood.

"Do you think a man should give jewelry to his mistress for any purpose but his own pleasure?" he asked. "This is the way I want you to wear it. Only for me. I like to look at it. It's beautiful."

She laughed; it was a soft, low, breathless sound. She could not speak or move, only nod silently in acceptance and obedience; she nodded several times, her hair swaying with the wide, circular movement of her head, then hanging still as she kept her head bowed to him.

She dropped down on the bed. She lay stretched lazily, her head thrown back, her arms at her sides, palms pressed to the rough texture of the bedspread, one leg bent, the long line of the other extended across the dark blue linen of the spread, the stone glowing like a wound in the semi-darkness, throwing a star of rays against her skin.

Her eyes were half-closed in the mocking, conscious triumph of being admired, but her mouth was half-open in helpless, begging expectation. He stood across the room, looking at her, at her flat stomach drawn in, as her breath was drawn, at the sensitive body of a sensitive consciousness. He said, his voice low,

intent and oddly quiet:

“Dagny, if some artist painted you as you are now, men would come to look at the painting to experience a moment that nothing could give them in their own lives. They would call it great art. They would not know the nature of what they felt, but the painting would show them everything—even that you’re not some classical Venus, but the Vice-President of a railroad, because that’s part of it—even what I am, because that’s part of it, too. Dagny, they’d feel it and go away and sleep with the first barmaid in sight—and they’d never try to reach what they had felt. *I* wouldn’t want to seek it from a painting. I’d want it real. I’d take no pride in any hopeless longing. I wouldn’t hold a stillborn aspiration. I’d want to have it, to make it, to live it. Do you understand?”

“Oh yes, Hank, *I* understand!” she said. Do *you*, my darling?—do you understand it fully?—she thought, but did not say it aloud.

On the evening of a blizzard, she came home to find an enormous spread of tropical flowers standing in her living room against the dark glass of windows battered by snowflakes. They were stems of Hawaiian Torch Ginger, three feet tall; their large heads were cones of petals that had the sensual texture of soft leather and the color of blood. “I saw them in a florist’s window,” he told her when he came, that night. “I liked seeing them through a blizzard. But there’s nothing as wasted as an object in a public window.”

She began to find flowers in her apartment at unpredictable times, flowers sent without a card, but with the signature of the sender in their fantastic shapes, in the violent colors, in the extravagant cost. He brought her a gold necklace made of small hinged squares that formed a spread of solid gold to cover her neck and shoulders, like the collar of a knight’s armor—“Wear it with a black dress,” he ordered. He brought her a set of glasses that were tall, slender blocks of square-cut crystal, made by a famous jeweler. She watched the way he held one of the glasses when she served him a drink—as if the touch of the texture under his fingers, the taste of the drink and the sight of her face were the single form of an indivisible moment of enjoyment. “I used to see things I liked,” he said, “but I never bought them. There didn’t seem to be much meaning in it. There is, now.”

He telephoned her at the office, one winter morning, and said, not in the tone of an invitation, but in the tone of an executive’s order, “We’re going to have dinner together tonight. I want you to dress. Do you have any sort of blue evening gown? Wear it.”

The dress she wore was a slender tunic of dusty blue that gave her a look of

unprotected simplicity, the look of a statue in the blue shadows of a garden under the summer sun. What he brought and put over her shoulders was a cape of blue fox that swallowed her from the curve of her chin to the tips of her sandals. “Hank, that’s preposterous” —she laughed—“it’s not my kind of thing!” “No?” he asked, drawing her to a mirror.

The huge blanket of fur made her look like a child bundled for a snowstorm; the luxurious texture transformed the innocence of the awkward bundle into the elegance of a perversely intentional contrast: into a look of stressed sensuality. The fur was a soft brown, dimmed by an aura of blue that could not be seen, only felt like an enveloping mist, like a suggestion of color grasped not by one’s eyes but by one’s hands, as if one felt, without contact, the sensation of sinking one’s palms into the fur’s softness. The cape left nothing to be seen of her, except the brown of her hair, the blue-gray of her eyes, the shape of her mouth.

She turned to him, her smile startled and helpless. “I ... I didn’t know it would look like that.”

“I did.”

She sat beside him in his car as he drove through the dark streets of the city. A sparkling net of snow flashed into sight once in a while, when they went past the lights on the corners. She did not ask where they were going. She sat low in the seat, leaning back, looking up at the snowflakes. The fur cape was wrapped tightly about her; within it, her dress felt as light as a nightgown and the feel of the cape was like an embrace.

She looked at the angular tiers of lights rising through the snowy curtain, and —glancing at him, at the grip of his gloved hands on the wheel, at the austere, fastidious elegance of the figure in black overcoat and white muffler—she thought that he belonged in a great city, among polished sidewalks and sculptured stone.

The car went down into a tunnel, streaked through an echoing tube of tile under the river and rose to the coils of an elevated highway under an open black sky. The lights were below them now, spread in flat miles of bluish windows, of smokestacks, slanting cranes, red gusts of fire, and long, dim rays silhouetting the contorted shapes of an industrial district. She thought that she had seen him once, at his mills, with smudges of soot on his forehead, dressed in acid-eaten overalls; he had worn them as naturally well as he wore his formal clothes. He belonged here, too—she thought, looking down at the flats of New Jersey—among the cranes, the fires and the grinding clatter of gears.

When they sped down a dark road through an empty countryside, with the

strands of snow glittering across their headlights—she remembered how he had looked in the summer of their vacation, dressed in slacks, stretched on the ground of a lonely ravine, with the grass under his body and the sun on his bare arms. He belonged in the countryside, she thought—he belonged everywhere—he was a man who belonged on earth—and then she thought of the words which were more exact: he was a man to whom the earth belonged, the man at home on earth and in control. Why, then—she wondered—should he have had to carry a burden of tragedy which, in silent endurance, he had accepted so completely that he had barely known he carried it? She knew part of the answer; she felt as if the whole answer were close and she would grasp it on some approaching day. But she did not want to think of it now, because they were moving away from the burdens, because within the space of a speeding car they held the stillness of full happiness. She moved her head imperceptibly to let it touch his shoulder for a moment.

The car left the highway and turned toward the lighted squares of distant windows, that hung above the snow beyond a grillwork of bare branches. Then, in a soft, dim light, they sat at a table by a window facing darkness and trees. The inn stood on a knoll in the woods; it had the luxury of high cost and privacy, and an air of beautiful taste suggesting that it had not been discovered by those who sought high cost and notice. She was barely aware of the dining room; it blended away into a sense of superlative comfort, and the only ornament that caught her attention was the glitter of iced branches beyond the glass of the window.

She sat, looking out, the blue fur half-slipping off her naked arms and shoulders. He watched her through narrowed eyes, with the satisfaction of a man studying his own workmanship.

“I like giving things to you,” he said, “because you don’t need them.”

“No?”

“And it’s not that I want you to have them. I want you to have them from me.”

“That is the way I do need them, Hank. From you.”

“Do you understand that it’s nothing but vicious self-indulgence on my part? I’m not doing it for your pleasure, but for mine.”

“Hank!” The cry was involuntary; it held amusement, despair, indignation and pity. “If you’d given me those things just for my pleasure, not yours, I would have thrown them in your face.”

“Yes . . . Yes, then you would—and should.”

“Did you call it your vicious self-indulgence?”

“That’s what they call it.”

“Oh, yes! That’s what they call it. What do *you* call it, Hank?”

“I don’t know,” he said indifferently, and went on intently. “I know only that if it’s vicious, then let me be damned for it, but that’s what I want to do more than anything else on earth.”

She did not answer; she sat looking straight at him with a faint smile, as if asking him to listen to the meaning of his own words.

“I’ve always wanted to enjoy my wealth,” he said. “I didn’t know how to do it. I didn’t even have time to know how much I wanted to. But I knew that all the steel I poured came back to me as liquid gold, and the gold was meant to harden into any shape I wished, and it was I who had to enjoy it. Only I couldn’t. I couldn’t find any purpose for it. I’ve found it, now. It’s I who’ve produced that wealth and it’s I who am going to let it buy for me every kind of pleasure I want—including the pleasure of seeing now much I’m able to pay for—including the preposterous feat of turning you into a luxury object.”

“But I’m a luxury object that you’ve paid for long ago,” she said; she was not smiling.

“How?”

“By means of the same values with which you paid for your mills.”

She did not know whether he understood it with that full, luminous finality which is a thought named in words; but she knew that what he felt in that moment was understanding. She saw the relaxation of an invisible smile in his eyes.

“I’ve never despised luxury,” he said, “yet I’ve always despised those who enjoyed it. I looked at what they called their pleasures and it seemed so miserably senseless to me—after what I felt at the mills. I used to watch steel being poured, tons of liquid steel running as I wanted it to, where I wanted it. And then I’d go to a banquet and I’d see people who sat trembling in awe before their own gold dishes and lace tablecloths, as if their dining room were the master and they were just objects serving it, objects created by their diamond shirt studs and necklaces, not the other way around. Then I’d run to the sight of the first slag heap I could find—and they’d say that I didn’t know how to enjoy life, because I cared for nothing but business.”

He looked at the dim, sculptured beauty of the room and at the people who sat at the tables. They sat in a manner of self-conscious display, as if the enormous cost of their clothes and the enormous care of their grooming should have fused into splendor, but didn’t. Their faces had a look of rancorous anxiety.

“Dagny, look at those people. They’re supposed to be the playboys of life, the amusement-seekers and luxury-lovers. They sit there, waiting for this place to give them meaning, not the other way around. But they’re always shown to us as the enjoyers of material pleasures -and then we’re taught that enjoyment of material pleasures is evil. Enjoyment? Are they enjoying it? Isn’t there some sort of perversion in what we’re taught, some error that’s vicious and very important?”

“Yes, Hank—very vicious and very, very important.”

“They are the playboys, while we’re just tradesmen, you and I. Do you realize that we’re much more capable of enjoying this place than they can ever hope to be?”

“Yes.”

He said slowly, in the tone of a quotation, “Why have we left it all to fools? It should have been ours.” She looked at him, startled. He smiled. “I remember every word you said to me at that party. I didn’t answer you then, because the only answer I had, the only thing your words meant to me, was an answer that you would hate me for, I thought; it was that I wanted you.” He looked at her. “Dagny, you didn’t intend it then, but what you were saying was that you wanted to sleep with me, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, Hank. Of course.”

He held her eyes, then looked away. They were silent for a long time. He glanced at the soft twilight around them, then at the sparkle of two wine glasses on their table. “Dagny, in my youth, when I was working in the ore mines in Minnesota, I thought that I wanted to reach an evening like this. No, that was not what I was working for, and I didn’t think of it often. But once in a while, on a winter night, when the stars were out and it was very cold, when I was tired, because I had worked two shifts, and wanted nothing on earth except to lie down and fall asleep right there, on the mine ledge—I thought that some day I would sit in a place like this, where one drink of wine would cost more than my day’s wages, and I would have earned the price of every minute of it and of every drop and of every flower on the table, and I would sit there for no purpose but my own amusement.”

She asked, smiling, “With your mistress?”

She saw the shot of pain in his eyes and wished desperately that she had not said it.

“With . . . a woman,” he answered. She knew the word he had not pronounced. He went on, his voice soft and steady: “When I became rich and

saw what the rich did for their amusement, I thought that the place I had imagined, did not exist. I had not even imagined it too clearly. I did not know what it would be like, only what I would feel. I gave up expecting it years ago. But I feel it tonight.”

He raised his glass, looking at her.

“Hank, I ... I’d give up anything I’ve ever had in my life, except my being a ... a luxury object of your amusement.”

He saw her hand trembling as she held her glass. He said evenly, “I know it, dearest.”

She sat shocked and still: he had never used that word before. He threw his head back and smiled the most brilliantly gay smile she had ever seen on his face.

“Your first moment of weakness, Dagny,” he said.

She laughed and shook her head. He stretched his arm across the table and closed his hand over her naked shoulder, as if giving her an instant’s support. Laughing softly, and as if by accident, she let her mouth brush against his fingers; it kept her face down for the one moment when he could have seen that the brilliance of her eyes was tears.

When she looked up at him, her smile matched his—and the rest of the evening was their celebration—for all his years since the nights on the mine ledges—for all her years since the night of her first ball when, in desolate longing for an uncaptured vision of gaiety, she had wondered about the people who expected the lights and the flowers to make them brilliant.

“Isn’t there ... in what we’re taught ... some error that’s vicious and very important?”—she thought of his words, as she lay in an armchair of her living room, on a dismal evening of spring, waiting for him to come.... Just a little farther, my darling—she thought—look a little farther and you’ll be free of that error and of all the wasted pain you never should have had to carry.... But she felt that she, too, had not seen the whole of the distance, and she wondered what were the steps left for her to discover....

Walking through the darkness of the streets, on his way to her apartment, Rearden kept his hands in his coat pockets and his arms pressed to his sides, because he felt that he did not want to touch anything or brush against anyone. He had never experienced it before -this sense of revulsion that was not aroused by any particular object, but seemed to flood everything around him, making the city seem sodden. He could understand disgust for any one thing, and he could fight that thing with the healthy indignation of knowing that it did not belong in

the world; but this was new to him—this feeling that the world was a loathsome place where he did not want to belong.

He had held a conference with the producers of copper, who had just been garroted by a set of directives that would put them out of existence in another year. He had had no advice to give them, no solution to offer; his ingenuity, which had made him famous as the man who would always find a way to keep production going, had not been able to discover a way to save them. But they had all known that there was no way; ingenuity was a virtue of the mind—and in the issue confronting them, the mind had been discarded as irrelevant long ago. “It’s a deal between the boys in Washington and the importers of copper,” one of the men had said, “mainly d’Anconia Copper.”

This was only a small, extraneous stab of pain, he thought, a feeling of disappointment in an expectation he had never had the right to expect; he should have known that this was just what a man like Francisco d’Anconia would do—and he wondered angrily why he felt as if a bright, brief flame had died somewhere in a lightless world.

He did not know whether the impossibility of acting had given him this sense of loathing, or whether the loathing had made him lose the desire to act. It’s both, he thought; a desire presupposes the possibility of action to achieve it; action presupposes a goal which is worth achieving. If the only goal possible was to wheedle a precarious moment’s favor from men who held guns, then neither action nor desire could exist any longer.

Then could life?—he asked himself indifferently. Life, he thought, had been defined as motion; man’s life was purposeful motion; what was the state of a being to whom purpose and motion were denied, a being held in chains but left to breathe and to see all the magnificence of the possibilities he could have reached, left to scream “Why?” and to be shown the muzzle of a gun as sole explanation? He shrugged, walking on; he did not care even to find an answer.

He observed, indifferently, the devastation wrought by his own indifference. No matter how hard a struggle he had lived through in the past, he had never reached the ultimate ugliness of abandoning the will to act. In moments of suffering, he had never let pain win its one permanent victory: he had never allowed it to make him lose the desire for joy. He had never doubted the nature of the world or man’s greatness as its motive power and its core. Years ago, he had wondered with contemptuous incredulity about the fanatical sects that appeared among men in the dark corners of history, the sects who believed that man was trapped in a malevolent universe ruled by evil for the sole purpose of

his torture. Tonight, he knew what their vision of the world and their feel of it had been. If what he now saw around him was the world in which he lived, then he did not want to touch any part of it, he did not want to fight it, he was an outsider with nothing at stake and no concern for remaining alive much longer.

Dagny and his wish to see her were the only exception left to him. The wish remained. But in a sudden shock, he realized that he felt no desire to sleep with her tonight. That desire—which had never given him a moment's rest, which had been growing, feeding on its own satisfaction—was wiped out. It was an odd impotence, neither of his mind nor of his body. He felt, as passionately as he had ever felt it, that she was the most desirable woman on earth; but what came from it was only a desire to desire her, a wish to feel, not a feeling. The sense of numbness seemed impersonal, as if its root were neither in him nor in her; as if it were the act of sex that now belonged to a realm which he had left.

“Don't get up—stay there—it's so obvious that you've been waiting for me that I want to look at it longer.”

He said it, from the doorway of her apartment, seeing her stretched in an armchair, seeing the eager little jolt that threw her shoulders forward as she was about to rise; he was smiling.

He noted—as if some part of him were watching his reactions with detached curiosity—that his smile and his sudden sense of gaiety were real. He grasped a feeling that he had always experienced, but never identified because it had always been absolute and immediate: a feeling that forbade him ever to face her in pain. It was much more than the pride of wishing to conceal his suffering: it was the feeling that suffering must not be granted recognition in her presence, that no form of claim between them should ever be motivated by pain and aimed at pity. It was not pity that he brought here or came here to find.

“Do you still need proof that I'm always waiting for you?” she asked, leaning obediently back in her chair; her voice was neither tender nor pleading, but bright and mocking.

“Dagny, why is it that most women would never admit that, but you do?”

“Because they're never sure that they ought to be wanted. I am.”

“I do admire self-confidence.”

“Self-confidence was only one part of what I said, Hank.”

“What's the whole?”

“Confidence of my value—and yours.” He glanced at her as if catching the spark of a sudden thought, and she laughed, adding, “I wouldn't be sure of holding a man like Orren Boyle, for instance. He wouldn't want me at all. You

would.”

“Are you saying,” he asked slowly, “that I rose in your estimation when you found that I wanted you?”

“Of course.”

“That’s not the reaction of most people to being wanted.”

“It isn’t.”

“Most people feel that they rise in their own eyes, if others want them.”

“I feel that others live up to me, if they want me. And that is the way you feel, too, Hank, about yourself—whether you admit it or not.”

That’s not what I said to you then, on that first morning—he thought, looking down at her. She lay stretched out lazily, her face blank, but her eyes bright with amusement. He knew that she was thinking of it and that she knew he was. He smiled, but said nothing else.

As he sat half-stretched on the couch, watching her across the room, he felt at peace—as if some temporary wall had risen between him and the things he had felt on his way here. He told her about his encounter with the man from the State Science Institute, because, even though he knew that the event held danger, an odd, glowing sense of satisfaction still remained from it in his mind.

He chuckled at her look of indignation. “Don’t bother being angry at them,” he said. “It’s no worse than all the rest of what they’re doing every day.”

“Hank, do you want me to speak to Dr. Stadler about it?”

“Certainly not!”

“He ought to stop it. He could at least do that much.”

“I’d rather go to jail. Dr. Stadler? You’re not having anything to do with him, are you?”

“I saw him a few days ago.”

“Why?”

“In regard to the motor.”

“The motor ... ?” He said it slowly, in a strange way, as if the thought of the motor had suddenly brought back to him a realm he had forgotten. “Dagny ... the man who invented that motor ... he did exist, didn’t he?”

“Why . . . of course. What do you mean?”

“I mean only that ... that it’s a pleasant thought, isn’t it? Even if he’s dead now, he was alive once . . . so alive that he designed that motor....”

“What’s the matter, Hank?”

“Nothing. Tell me about the motor.”

She told him about her meeting with Dr. Stadler. She got up and paced the

room, while speaking; she could not lie still, she always felt a surge of hope and of eagerness for action when she dealt with the subject of the motor.

The first thing he noticed were the lights of the city beyond the window: he felt as if they were being turned on, one by one, forming the great skyline he loved; he felt it, even though he knew that the lights had been there all the time. Then he understood that the thing which was returning was within him: the shape coming back drop by drop was his love for the city. Then he knew that it had come back because he was looking at the city past the taut, slender figure of a woman whose head was lifted eagerly as at a sight of distance, whose steps were a restless substitute for flight. He was looking at her as at a stranger, he was barely aware that she was a woman, but the sight was flowing into a feeling the words for which were: *This* is the world and the core of it, this is what made the city—they go together, the angular shapes of the buildings and the angular lines of a face stripped of everything but purpose—the rising steps of steel and the steps of a being intent upon his goal—this is what they had been, all the men who had lived to invent the lights, the steel, the furnaces, the motors—they were the world, *they*, not the men who crouched in dark corners, half-begging, half-threatening, boastfully displaying their open sores as their only claim on life and virtue—so long as he knew that there existed one man with the bright courage of a new thought, could he give up the world to those others?—so long as he could find a single sight to give him a life-restoring shot of admiration, could he believe that the world belonged to the sores, the moans and the guns?—the men who invented motors did exist, he would never doubt their reality, it was his vision of them that had made the contrast unbearable, so that even the loathing was the tribute of his loyalty to them and to that world which was theirs and his.

“Darling ...” he said, “darling . . .” like a man awakening suddenly, when he noticed that she had stopped speaking.

“What’s the matter, Hank?” she asked softly.

“Nothing . . . Except that you shouldn’t have called Stadler.” His face was bright with confidence, his voice sounded amused, protective and gentle; she could discover nothing else, he looked as he had always looked, it was only the note of gentleness that seemed strange and new.

“I kept feeling that I shouldn’t have,” she said, “but I didn’t know why.”

“I’ll tell you why.” He leaned forward. “What he wanted from you was a recognition that he was still the Dr. Robert Stadler he should have been, but wasn’t and knew he wasn’t. He wanted you to grant him your respect, in spite of and in contradiction to his actions. He wanted you to juggle reality for him, so

that his greatness would remain, but the State Science Institute would be wiped out, as if it had never existed—and you're the only one who could do it for him."

"Why I?"

"Because you're the victim."

She looked at him, startled. He spoke intently; he felt a sudden, violent clarity of perception, as if a surge of energy were rushing into the activity of sight, fusing the half-seen and half-grasped into a single shape and direction.

"Dagny, they're doing something that we've never understood. They know something which we don't, but should discover. I can't see it fully yet, but I'm beginning to see parts of it. That looter from the State Science Institute was scared when I refused to help him pretend that he was just an honest buyer of my Metal. He was scared way deep. Of what? I don't know—public opinion was just his name for it, but it's not the full name. Why should he have been scared? He has the guns, the jails, the laws—he could have seized the whole of my mills, if he wished, and nobody would have risen to defend me, and he knew it—so why should he have cared what I thought? But he did. It was I who had to tell him that he wasn't a looter, but my customer and friend. That's what he needed from me. And that's what Dr. Stadler needed from you—it was you who had to act as if he were a great man who had never tried to destroy your rail and my Metal. I don't know what it is that they think they accomplish—but they want us to pretend that we see the world as they pretend they see it. They need some sort of sanction from us. I don't know the nature of that sanction—but, Dagny, I know that if we value our lives, we must not give it to them. If they put you on a torture rack, don't give it to them. Let them destroy your railroad and my mills, but don't give it to them. Because I know this much: I know that that's our only chance."

She had remained standing still before him, looking attentively at the faint outline of some shape she, too, had tried to grasp.

"Yes ..." she said, "yes, I know what you've seen in them.... I've felt it, too—but it's only like something brushing past that's gone before I know I've seen it, like a touch of cold air, and what's left is always the feeling that I should have stopped it.... I know that you're right. I can't understand their game, but this much is right: We must not see the world as they want us to see it. It's some sort of fraud, very ancient and very vast—and the key to break it is: to check every premise they teach us, to question every precept, to—"

She whirled to him at a sudden thought, but she cut the motion and the words in the same instant: the next words-would have been the ones she did not want to

say to him. She stood looking at him with a slow, bright smile of curiosity.

Somewhere within him, he knew the thought she would not name, but he knew it only in that prenatal shape which has to find its words in the future. He did not pause to grasp it now—because in the flooding brightness of what he felt, another thought, which was its predecessor, had become clear to him and had been holding him for many minutes past. He rose, approached her and took her in his arms.

He held the length of her body pressed to his, as if their bodies were two currents rising upward together, each to a single point, each carrying the whole of their consciousness to the meeting of their lips.

What she felt in that moment contained, as one nameless part of it, the knowledge of the beauty in the posture of his body as he held her, as they stood in the middle of a room high above the lights of the city.

What he knew, what he had discovered tonight, was that his recaptured love of existence had not been given back to him by the return of his desire for her—but that the desire had returned after he had regained his world, the love, the value and the sense of his world—and that the desire was not an answer to her body, but a celebration of himself and of his will to live.

He did not know it, he did not think of it, he was past the need of words, but in the moment when he felt the response of her body to his, he felt also the unadmitted knowledge that that which he had called her depravity was her highest virtue—this capacity of hers to feel the joy of being, as he felt it.

CHAPTER IX

THE FACE WITHOUT PAIN OR FEAR OR GUILT

The silence of her apartment and the motionless perfection of objects that had remained just as she had left them a month before, struck her with a sense of relief and desolation together, when she entered her living room. The silence gave her an illusion of privacy and ownership; the sight of the objects reminded her that they were preserving a moment she could not recapture, as she could not undo the events that had happened since.

There was still a remnant of daylight beyond the windows. She had left the office earlier than she intended, unable to summon the effort for any task that could be postponed till morning. This was new to her -and it was new that she should now feel more at home in her apartment than in her office.

She took a shower, and stood for long, blank minutes, letting the water run over her body, but stepped out hastily when she realized that what she wanted to wash off was not the dust of the drive from the country, but the feel of the office.

She dressed, lighted a cigarette and walked into the living room, to stand at the window, looking at the city, as she had stood looking at the countryside at the start of this day.

She had said she would give her life for one more year on the railroad. She was back; but this was not the joy of working; it was only the clear, cold peace of a decision reached—and the stillness of unadmitted pain.

Clouds had wrapped the sky and had descended as fog to wrap the streets below, as if the sky were engulfing the city. She could see the whole of Manhattan Island, a long, triangular shape cutting into an invisible ocean. It looked like the prow of a sinking ship; a few tall buildings still rose above it, like funnels, but the rest was disappearing under gray-blue coils, going down slowly into vapor and space. This was how they had gone—she thought—Atlantis, the city that sank into the ocean, and all the other kingdoms that vanished, leaving the same legend in all the languages of men, and the same longing.

She felt—as she had felt it one spring night, slumped across her desk in the crumbling office of the John Galt Line, by a window facing a dark alley—the sense and vision of her own world, which she would never reach.... You—she thought—whoever you are, whom I have always loved and never found, you whom I expected to see at the end of the rails beyond the horizon, you whose

presence I had always felt in the streets of the city and whose world I had wanted to build, it is my love for you that had kept me moving, my love and my hope to reach you and my wish to be worthy of you on the day when I would stand before you face to face. Now I know that I shall never find you—that it is not to be reached or lived—but what is left of my life is still yours, and I will go on in your name, even though it is a name I'll never learn, I will go on serving you, even though I'm never to win, I will go on, to be worthy of you on the day when I would have met you, even though I won't.... She had never accepted hopelessness, but she stood at the window and, addressed to the shape of a fogbound city, it was her self-dedication to unrequited love.

The doorbell rang.

She turned with indifferent astonishment to open the door—but she knew that she should have expected him, when she saw that it was Francisco d.'Anconia. She felt no shock and no rebellion, only the cheerless serenity of her assurance—and she raised her head to face him, with a slow, deliberate movement, as if telling him that she had chosen her stand and that she stood in the open.

His face was grave and calm; the look of happiness was gone, but the amusement of the playboy had not returned. He looked as if all masks were down, he looked direct, tightly disciplined, intent upon a purpose, he looked like a man able to know the earnestness of action, as she had once expected him to look—he had never seemed so attractive as he did in this moment—and she noted, in astonishment, her sudden feeling that he was not a man who had deserted her, but a man whom she had deserted.

“Dagny, are you able to talk about it now?”

“Yes—if you wish. Come in.”

He glanced briefly at her living room, her home which he had never entered, then his eyes came back to her. He was watching her attentively. He seemed to know that the quiet simplicity of her manner was the worst of all signs for his purpose, that it was like a spread of ashes where no flicker of pain could be revived, that even pain would have been a form of fire.

“Sit down, Francisco.”

She remained standing before him, as if consciously letting him see that she had nothing to hide, not even the weariness of her posture, the price she had paid for this day and her carelessness of price.

“I don't think I can stop you now,” he said, “if you've made your choice. But if there's one chance left to stop you, it's a chance I have to take.”

She shook her head slowly. “There isn't. And—what for, Francisco? You've given up. What difference does it make to you whether I perish with the railroad or away from it?”

"I haven't given up the future."

"What future?"

"The day when the looters will perish, but we won't."

"If Taggart Transcontinental is to perish with the looters, then so am I."

He did not take his eyes off her face and he did not answer.

She added dispassionately, "I thought I could live without it. I can't. I'll never try it again. Francisco, do you remember?—we both believed, when we started, that the only sin on earth was to do things badly. I still believe it." The first note of life shuddered in her voice. "I can't stand by and watch what they did at that tunnel. I can't accept what they're all accepting—Francisco, it's the thing we thought so monstrous, you and I!—the belief that disasters are one's natural fate, to be borne, not fought. I can't accept submission. I can't accept helplessness. I can't accept renunciation. So long as there's a railroad left to run, I'll run it."

"In order to maintain the looters' world?"

"In order to maintain the last strip of mine."

"Dagny," he said slowly, "I know why one loves one's work. I know what it means to you, the job of running trains. But you would not run them if they were empty. Dagny, what is it you see when you think of a moving train?"

She glanced at the city. "The life of a man of ability who might have perished in that catastrophe, but will escape the next one, which I'll prevent—a man who has an intransigent mind and an unlimited ambition, and is in love with his own life ... the k>

He closed his eyes for an instant, and the tightening movement of his mouth was a smile, a smile substituting for a moan of understanding, amusement and pain. He asked, his voice gravely gentle, "Do you think that you can still serve him—that kind of man—by running the railroad?"

"Yes."

"All right, Dagny. I won't try to stop you. So long as you still think that, nothing can stop you, or should. You will stop on the day when you'll discover that your work has been placed in the service, not of that man's life, but of his destruction."

"Francisco!" It was a cry of astonishment and despair. "You do understand it, you know what I mean by that kind of man, you see him, too!"

"Oh yes," he said simply, casually, looking at some point in space within the room, almost as if he were seeing a real person. He added, "Why should you be astonished? You said that we were of his kind once, you and I. We still are. But one of us has betrayed him."

"Yes," she said sternly, "one of us has. We cannot serve him by renunciation."

"We cannot serve him by making terms with his destroyers."

“I’m not making terms with them. They need me. They know it. It’s my terms that I’ll make them accept.”

“By playing a game in which they gain benefits in exchange for harming you?”

“If I can keep Taggart Transcontinental in existence, it’s the only benefit I want. What do I care if they make me pay ransoms? Let them have what they want. I’ll have the railroad.”

He smiled. “Do you think so? Do you think that their need of you is your protection? Do you think that you can give them what they want? No, you won’t quit until you see, of your own sight and judgment, what it is that they really want. You know, Dagny, we were taught that some things belong to God and others to Caesar. Perhaps their God would permit it. But the man you say we’re serving—he does not permit it. He permits no divided allegiance, no war between your mind and your body, no gulf between your values and your actions, no tributes to Caesar. He permits no Caesars.”

“For twelve years,” she said softly, “I would have thought it inconceivable that there might come a day when I would have to beg your forgiveness on my knees. Now I think it’s possible. If I come to see that you’re right, I will. But not until then.”

“You will. But not on your knees.”

He was looking at her, as if he were seeing her body as she stood before him, even though his eyes were directed at her face, and his glance told her what form of atonement and surrender he was seeing in the future. She saw the effort he made to look away, his hope that she had not seen his glance or understood it, his silent struggle, betrayed by the tension of a few muscles under the skin of his face—the face she knew so well.

“Until then, Dagny, remember that we’re enemies. I didn’t want to tell you this, but you’re the first person who almost stepped into heaven and came back to earth. You’ve glimpsed too much, so you have to know this clearly. It’s you that I’m fighting, not your brother James or Wesley Mouch. It’s you that I have to defeat. I am out to end all the things that are most precious to you right now. While you’ll struggle to save Taggart Transcontinental, I will be working to destroy it. Don’t ever ask me for help or money. You know my reasons. Now you may hate me—as, from your stand, you should.”

She raised her head a little, there was no perceptible change in her posture, it was no more than her awareness of her own body and of its meaning to him, but for the length of one sentence she stood as a woman, the suggestion of defiance coming only from the faintly stressed spacing of her words: “And what will it do to you?”

He looked at her, in full understanding, but neither admitting nor denying the confession she wanted to tear from him. “That is no one’s concern but mine,” he answered.

It was she who weakened, but realized, while saying it, that this was still more cruel: “I don’t hate you. I’ve tried to, for years, but I never will, no matter what we do, either one of us.”

“I know it,” he said, his voice low, so that she did not hear the pain, but felt it within herself as if by direct reflection from him.

“Francisco!” she cried, in desperate defense of him against herself. “How can you do what you’re doing?”

“By the grace of my love”—for you, said his eyes—“for the man,” said his voice, “who did not perish in your catastrophe and who will never perish.”

She stood silently still for a moment, as if in respectful acknowledgment. .

“I wish I could spare you what you’re going to go through,” he said, the gentleness of his voice saying: It’s not me that you should pity. “But I can’t. Every one of us has to travel that road by his own steps. But it’s the same road.”

“Where does it lead?”

He smiled, as if softly closing a door on the questions that he would not answer. “To Atlantis,” he said.

“What?” she asked, startled.

“Don’t you remember?—the lost city that only the spirits of heroes can enter.”

The connection that struck her suddenly had been struggling in her mind since morning, like a dim anxiety she had had no time to identify. She had known it, but she had thought only of his own fate and his personal decision, she had thought of him as acting alone. Now she remembered a wider danger and sensed the vast, undefined shape of the enemy she was facing.

“You’re one of them,” she said slowly, “aren’t you?”

“Of whom?”

“Was it *you* in Ken Danagger’s office?”

He smiled. “No.” But she noted that he did not ask what she meant.

“Is there—you would know it—is there actually a destroyer loose in the world?”

“Of course.”

“Who is it?”

“You.”

She shrugged; her face was growing hard. “The men who’ve quit, are they still alive or dead?”

“They’re dead—as far as you’re concerned. But there’s to be a Second Renaissance in the world. I’ll wait for it.”

“No!” The sudden violence of her voice was in personal answer to him, to one of the two things he had wanted her to hear in his words. “No, don’t wait for me!”

“I’ll always wait for you, no matter what we do, either one of us.”

The sound they heard was the turning of a key in the lock of the entrance door. The door opened and Hank Rearden came in.

He stoppehold, then walked slowly into the living room, his hand slipping the key into his pocket.

She knew that he had seen Francisco’s face before he had seen hers. He glanced at her, but his eyes came back to Francisco, as if this were the only face he was now able to see.

It was at Francisco’s face that she was afraid to look. The effort she made to pull her glance along the curve of a few steps felt as if she were pulling a weight beyond her power. Francisco had risen to his feet, as if in the unhurried, automatic manner of a d.‘Anconia trained to the code of courtesy. There was nothing that Rearden could see in his face. But what she saw in it was worse than she had feared.

“What are you doing here?” asked Rearden, in the tone one would use to address a menial caught in a drawing room.

“I see that I have no right to ask you the same question,” said Francisco. She knew what effort was required to achieve the clear, toneless quality of his voice. His eyes kept returning to Rearden’s right hand, as if he were still seeing the key between his fingers.

“Then answer it,” said Rearden.

“Hank, any questions you wish to ask should be asked of me,” she said.

Rearden did not seem to see or hear her. “Answer it,” he repeated.

“There is only one answer which you would have the right to demand,” said Francisco, “so I will answer you that that is not the reason of my presence here.”

“There is only one reason for your presence in the house of any woman,” said Rearden. “And I mean, any woman—as far as you’re concerned. Do you think that I believe it now, that confession of yours or anything you ever said to me?”

“I have given you grounds not to trust me, but none to include Miss Taggart.”

“Don’t tell me that you have no chance here, never had and never will. I know it. But that I should find you here on the first—”

“Hank, if you wish to accuse me—” she began, but Rearden whirled to her.

“God, no, Dagny, I don.‘t! But you shouldn’t be seen speaking to him. You shouldn’t deal with him in any way. You don’t know him. I do.” He turned to Francisco. “What are you after? Are you hoping to include her among your kind of conquests or—”

“No!” It was an involuntary cry and it sounded futile, with its passionate sincerity offered—to be rejected—as its only proof.

“No? Then are you here on a matter of business? Are you setting a trap, as you did for me? What sort of double-cross are you preparing for her?”

“My purpose ... was not ... a matter of business.”

“Then what was it?”

“If you still care to believe me, I can tell you only that it involved no ... betrayal of any kind.”

“Do you think that you may still discuss betrayal, in my presence?”

“I will answer you some day. I cannot answer you now.”

“You don’t like to be reminded of it, do you? You’ve stayed away from me since, haven’t you? You didn’t expect to see me here? You didn’t want to face me?” But he knew that Francisco was facing him as no one else did these days—he saw the eyes held straight to meet his, the features composed, without emotion, without defense or appeal, set to endure whatever was coming—he saw the open, unprotected look of courage—this was the face of the man he had loved, the man who had set him free of guilt—and he found himself fighting against the knowledge that this face still held him, above all else, above his month of impatience for the sight of Dagny. “Why don’t you defend yourself, if you have nothing to hide? Why are you here? Why were you stunned to see me enter?”

“Hank, stop it!” Dagny’s voice was a cry, and she drew back, knowing that violence was the most dangerous element to introduce into this moment.

Both men turned to her. “Please let me be the one to answer,” Francisco said quietly.

“I told you that I hoped I’d never see him again,” said Rearden. “I’m sorry if it has to be here. It doesn’t concern you, but there’s something he must be paid for.”

“If that is ... your purpose,” Francisco said with effort, “haven’t you ... achieved it already?”

“What’s the matter?” Rearden’s face was frozen, his lips barely moving, but his voice had the sound of a chuckle. “Is this your way of asking for mercy?”

The instant of silence was Francisco’s strain to a greater effort. “Yes ... if you wish,” he answered.

“Did you grant it when you held my future in your hands?”

“You are justified in anything you wish to think of me. But since it doesn’t concern Miss Taggart ... would you now permit me to leave?”

“No! Do you want to evade it, like all those other cowards? Do you want to escape?”

“I will come anywhere you require any time you wish. But I would rather it were not in Miss Taggart’s presence.”

“Why not? I want it to be in her presence, since this is the one place you had no right to come. I have nothing left to protect from you, you’ve taken more than the looters can ever take, you’ve destroyed everything you’ve touched, but here is one thing you’re not going to touch.” He knew that the rigid absence of emotion in Francisco’s face was the strongest evidence of emotion, the evidence of some abnormal effort at control—he knew that this was torture and that he, Rearden, was driven blindly by a feeling which resembled a torturer’s enjoyment, except that he was now unable to tell whether he was torturing Francisco or himself. “You’re worse than the looters, because you betray with full understanding of that which you’re betraying. I don’t know what form of corruption is your motive—but I want you to learn that there are things beyond your reach, beyond your aspiration or your malice.”

“You have nothing ... to fear from me ... now.”

“I want you to learn that you are not to think of her, not to look at her, not to approach her. Of all men, it’s you who’re not to appear in her presence.” He knew that he was driven by a desperate anger at his own feeling for this man, that the feeling still lived, that it was this feeling which he had to outrage and destroy. “Whatever your motive, it’s from any contact with you that she has to be protected.”

“If I gave you my word—” He stopped.

Rearden chuckled. “I know what they mean, your words, your convictions, your friendship and your oath by the only woman you ever—” He stopped. They all knew what this meant, in the same instant that Rearden knew it.

He made a step toward Francisco; he asked, pointing at Dagny, his voice low and strangely unlike his own voice, as if it neither came from nor were addressed to a living person, “Is this the woman you love?”

Francisco closed his eyes.

“Don’t ask him that!” The cry was Dagny’s.

“Is this the woman you love?”

Francisco answered, looking at her, “Yes.”

Rearden’s hand rose, swept down and slapped Francisco’s face.

The scream came from Dagny. When she could see again—after an instant that felt as if the blow had struck her own cheek—Francisco’s hands were the first thing she saw. The heir of the d.‘Anconias stood thrown back against a table, clasping the edge behind him, not to support himself, but to stop his own hands. She saw the rigid stillness of his body, a body that was pulled too straight but seemed broken, with the slight, unnatural angles of his waistline and

shoulders, with his arms held stiff but slanted back—he stood as if the effort not to move were turning the force of his violence against himself, as if the motion he resisted were running through his muscles as a tearing pain. She saw his convulsed fingers struggling to grow fast to the table's edge, she wondered which would break first, the wood of the table or the bones of the man, and she knew that Rearden's life hung in the balance.

When her eyes moved up to Francisco's face, she saw no sign of struggle, only the skin of his temples pulled tight and the planes of his cheeks drawn inward, seeming faintly more hollow than usual. It made his face look naked, pure and young. She felt terror because she was seeing in his eyes the tears which were not there. His eyes were brilliant and dry. He was looking at Rearden, but it was not Rearden that he was seeing. He looked as if he were facing another presence in the room and as if his glance were saying: If this is what you demand of me, then even this is yours, yours to accept and mine to endure, there is no more than this in me to offer you, but let me be proud to know that I can offer so much. She saw—with a single artery beating under the skin of his throat, with a froth of pink in the corner of his mouth—the look of an enraptured dedication which was almost a smile, and she knew that she was witnessing Francisco d'Anconia's greatest achievement. .

When she felt herself shaking and heard her own voice, it seemed to meet the last echo of her scream in the air of the room—and she realized how brief a moment had passed between. Her voice had the savage sound of rising to deliver a blow and it was crying to Rearden:

“—to protect me from *him*? Long before you ever—”

“Don.‘t!” Francisco's head jerked to her, the brief snap of his voice held all of his unreleased violence, and she knew it was an order that had to be obeyed.

Motionless but for the slow curve of his head, Francisco turned to Rearden. She saw his hands leave the edge of the table and hang relaxed by his sides. It was Rearden that he was now seeing, and there was nothing in Francisco's face except the exhaustion of effort, but Rearden knew suddenly how much this man had loved him.

“Within the extent of your knowledge,” Francisco said quietly, “you are right.”

Neither expecting nor permitting an answer, he turned to leave. He bowed to Dagny, inclining his head in a manner that appeared as a simple gesture of leave-taking to Rearden, as a gesture of acceptance to her. Then he left.

Rearden stood looking after him, knowing—without context and with absolute certainty—that he would give his life for the power not to have committed the action he had committed.

When he turned to Dagny, his face looked drained, open and faintly attentive, as if he were not questioning her about the words she had cut off, but were waiting for them to come.

A shudder of pity ran through her body and ended in the movement of shaking her head: she did not know for which of the two men the pity was intended, but it made her unable to speak and she shook her head over and over again, as if trying desperately to negate some vast, impersonal suffering that had made them all its victims.

“If there’s something that must be said, say it.” His voice was toneless.

The sound she made was half-chuckle, half-moan—it was not a desire for vengeance, but a desperate sense of justice that drove the cutting bitterness of her voice, as she cried, consciously throwing the words at his face, “You wanted to know the name of that other man? The man I slept with? The man who had me first? It was Francisco d.3‘Anconia!”

She saw the force of the blow by seeing his face swept blank. She knew that if justice was her purpose, she had achieved it—because this slap was worse than the one he had dealt.

She felt suddenly calm, knowing that her words had had to be said for the sake of all three of them. The despair of a helpless victim left her, she was not a victim any longer, she was one of the contestants, willing to bear the responsibility of action. She stood facing him, waiting for any answer he would choose to give her, feeling almost as if it were her turn to be subjected to violence.

She did not know what form of torture he was enduring, or what he saw being wrecked within him and kept himself the only one to see. There was no sign of pain to give her any warning; he looked as if he were just a man who stood still in the middle of a room, making his consciousness absorb a fact that it refused to absorb. Then she noticed that he did not change his posture, that even his hands hung by his sides with the fingers half-bent as they had been for a long time, it seemed to her that she could feel the heavy numbness of the blood stopping in his fingers—and this was the only clue to his suffering she was able to find, but it told her that that which he felt left him no power to feel anything else, not even the existence of his own body. She waited, her pity vanishing and becoming respect.

Then she saw his eyes move slowly from her face down the length of her body, and she knew the sort of torture he was now choosing to experience, because it was a glance of a nature he could not hide from her. She knew that he was seeing her as she had been at seventeen, he was seeing her with the rival he hated, he was seeing them together as they would be now, a sight he could

neither endure nor resist. She saw the protection of control dropping from his face, but he did not care whether he let her see his face alive and naked, because there now was nothing to read in it except an unrevealing violence, some part of which resembled hatred.

He seized her shoulders, and she felt prepared to accept that he would now kill her or beat her into unconsciousness, and in the moment when she felt certain that he had thought of it, she felt her body thrown against him and his mouth falling on hers, more brutally than the act of a beating would have permitted.

She found herself, in terror, twisting her body to resist, and, in exultation, twisting her arms around him, holding him, letting her lips bring blood to his, knowing that she had never wanted him as she did in this moment.

When he threw her down on the couch, she knew, to the rhythm of the beat of his body, that it was the act of his victory over his rival and of his surrender to him, the act of ownership brought to unendurable violence by the thought of the man whom it was defying, the act of transforming his hatred for the pleasure that man had known into the intensity of his own pleasure, his conquest of that man by means of her body—she felt Francisco's presence through Rearden's mind, she felt as if she were surrendering to both men, to that which she had worshipped in both of them, that which they held in common, that essence of character which had made of her love for each an act of loyalty to both. She knew also that this was his rebellion against the world around them, against its worship of degradation, against the long torment of his wasted days and lightless struggle—this was what he wished to assert and, alone with her in the half-darkness high in space above a city of ruins, to hold as the last of his property.

Afterwards, they lay still, his face on her shoulder. The reflection of a distant electric sign kept beating in faint flashes on the ceiling above her head.

He reached for her hand and slipped her fingers under his face to let his mouth rest against her palm for a moment, so gently that she felt his motive more than his touch.

After a while, she got up, she reached for a cigarette, lighted it, then held it out to him with a slight, questioning lift of her hand; he nodded, still sitting half-stretched on the couch; she placed the cigarette between his lips and lighted another for herself. She felt a great sense of peace between them, and the intimacy of the unimportant gestures underscored the importance of the things they were not saying to each other. Everything was said, she thought—but knew that it waited to be acknowledged.

She saw his eyes move to the entrance door once in a while and remain on it for long moments, as if he were still seeing the man who had left.

He said quietly, "He could have beaten me by letting me have the truth, any

time he wished. Why didn't he?"

She shrugged, spreading her hands in a gesture of helpless sadness, because they both knew the answer. She asked, "He did mean a great deal to you, didn't he?"

"He does."

The two dots of fire at the tips of their cigarettes had moved slowly to the tips of their fingers, with the small glow of an occasional flare and the soft crumbling of ashes as sole movement in the silence, when the doorbell rang. They knew that it was not the man they wished but could not hope to see return, and she frowned with sudden anger as she went to open the door. It took her a moment to remember that the innocuously courteous figure she saw bowing to her with a standard smile of welcome was the assistant manager of the apartment house.

"Good evening, Miss Taggart. We're so glad to see you back. I just came on duty and heard that you had returned and wanted to greet you in person."

"Thank you." She stood at the door, not moving to admit him.

"I have a letter that came for you about a week ago, Miss Taggart," he said, reaching into his pocket. "It looked as if it might be important, but being marked 'personal,' it was obviously not intended to be sent to your office and, besides, they did not know your address, either—so not knowing where to forward it, I kept it in our safe and I thought I'd deliver it to you in person."

The envelope he handed to her was marked: Registered—Air Mail -Special Delivery—Personal. The return address said: Quentin Daniels, Utah Institute of Technology, Afton, Utah.

"Oh ... Thank you."

The assistant manager noted that her voice went dropping toward a whisper, the polite disguise for a gasp, he noted that she stood looking down at the sender's name much longer than was necessary, so he repeated his good wishes and departed.

She was tearing the envelope open as she walked toward Rearden, and she stopped in the middle of the room to read the letter. It was typewritten on thin paper—he could see the black rectangles of the paragraphs through the transparent sheets—and he could see her face as she read them.

He expected it, by the time he saw her come to the end: she leaped to the telephone, he heard the violent whirl of the dial and her voice saying with trembling urgency, "Long-distance, please ... Operator, get me the Utah Institute of Technology at Afton, Utah!"

He asked, approaching, "What is it?"

She extended the letter, not looking at him, her eyes fixed on the telephone, as if she could force it to answer.

The letter said: .

Dear Miss Taggart:

I have fought it out for three weeks, I did not want to do it, I know how this will hit you and I know every argument you could offer me, because I have used them all against myself—but this is to tell you that I am quitting.

I cannot work under the terms of Directive 10-289—though not for the reason its perpetrators intended. I know that their abolition of all scientific research does not mean a damn to you or me, and that you would want me to continue. But I have to quit, because I do not wish to succeed any longer.

I do not wish to work in a world that regards me as a slave. I do not wish to be of any value to people. If I succeeded in rebuilding the motor, I would not let you place it in their service. I would not take it upon my conscience that anything produced by my mind should be used to bring them comfort.

I know that if we succeed, they will be only too eager to expropriate the motor. And for the sake of that prospect, we have to accept the position of criminals, you and I, and live under the threat of being arrested at any moment at their whim. And this is the thing that I cannot take, even were I able to take all the rest: that in order to give them an inestimable benefit, we should be made martyrs to the men who, but for us, could not have conceived of it. I might have forgiven the rest, but when I think of this, I say: May they be damned, I will see them all die of starvation, myself included, rather than forgive them for this or permit it!

To tell you the full truth, I want to succeed, to solve the secret of the motor, as much as ever. So I shall continue to work on it for my own sole pleasure and for as long as I last. But if I solve it, it will remain my private secret. I will not release it for any commercial use. Therefore, I cannot take your money any longer. Commercialism is supposed to be despicable, so all those people should truly approve of my decision, and I—I'm tired of helping those who despise me.

I don't know how long I will last or what I will do in the future. For the moment, I intend to remain in my job at this Institute. But if any of its trustees or receivers should remind me that I am now legally forbidden to cease being a janitor, I will quit.

You had given me my greatest chance and if I am now giving you a painful blow, perhaps I should ask you to forgive me. I think that you love your work as much as I loved mine, so you will know that my decision was not easy to make, but that I had to make it.

It is a strange feeling—writing this letter. I do not intend to die, but I am

giving up the world and this feels like the letter of a suicide. So I want to say that of all the people I have known, you are the only person I regret leaving behind.

Sincerely yours,
Quentin Daniels

When he looked up from the letter, he heard her saying, as he had heard her through the words of the typewritten lines, her voice rising closer to despair each time:

“Keep ringing, Operator! ... Please keep ringing!”

“What can you tell him?” he asked. “There are no arguments to offer.”

“I won’t have a chance to tell him! He’s gone by now. It was a week ago. I’m sure he’s gone. They’ve got him.”

“Who got him?”

“Yes, Operator, I’ll hold the line, keep trying!”

“What would you tell him if he answered?”

“I’d beg him to go on taking my money, with no strings attached, no conditions, just so he’ll have the means to continue! I’ll promise him that if we’re still in a looters’ world when and if he succeeds, I won’t ask him to give me the motor or even to tell me its secret. But if, by that time, we’re free—” She stopped.

“If we’re free ...”

“All I want from him now is that he doesn’t give up and vanish, like ... like all those others. I don’t want to let them get him. If it’s not too late—oh God, I don’t want them to get him! ... Yes, Operator, keep ringing!”

“What good will it do us, even if he continues to work?”

“That’s all I’ll beg him to do—just to continue. Maybe we’ll never get a chance to use the motor in the future. But I want to know that somewhere in the world there’s still a great brain at work on a great attempt—and that we still have a chance at a future.... If that motor is abandoned *again*, then there’s nothing but Starnesville ahead of us.”

“Yes. I know.”

She held the receiver pressed to her ear, her arm stiff with the effort not to tremble. She waited, and he heard, in the silence, the futile clicking of the unanswered call.

“He’s gone,” she said. “They got him. A week is much longer than they need. I don’t know how they learn when the time is right, but this” -she pointed at the letter—“this was their time and they wouldn’t have missed it.”

“Who?”

“The destroyer’s agents.”

“Are you beginning to think that they really exist?”

“Yes.”

“Are you serious?”

“I am. I’ve met one of them.”

“Who?”

“I’ll tell you later. I don’t know who their leader is, but I’m going to find out, one of these days. I’m going to find out. I’ll be damned if I let them—”

She broke off on a gasp; he saw the change in her face the moment before he heard the click of a distant receiver being lifted and the sound of a man’s voice saying, across the wire, “Hello?”

“Daniels! Is that *you*? You’re alive? You’re still there?”

“Why, yes. Is this you, Miss Taggart? What’s the matter?”

“I ... I thought you were gone.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I just heard the phone ringing, I was out in the back lot, gathering carrots.”

“Carrots?” She was laughing with hysterical relief.

“I have my own vegetable patch out there. Used to be the Institute’s parking lot. Are you calling from New York, Miss Taggart?”

“Yes. I just received your letter. Just now. I ... I had been away.”

“Oh.” There was a pause, then he said quietly, “There’s really nothing more to be said about it, Miss Taggart.”

“Tell me, are you going away?”

“No.”

“You’re not planning to go?”

“No. Where?”

“Do you intend to remain at the Institute?”

“Yes.”

“For how long? Indefinitely?”

“Yes—as far as I know.”

“Has anyone approached you?”

“About what?”

“About leaving.”

“No. Who?”

“Listen, Daniels, I won’t try to discuss your letter over the phone. But I must speak to you. I’m coming to see you. I’ll get there as fast as I can.”

“I don’t want you to do that, Miss Taggart. I don’t want you to go to such an effort, when it’s useless.”

“Give me a chance, won’t you? You don’t have to promise to change your

mind, you don't have to commit yourself to anything—only to give me a hearing. If I want to come, it's my risk, I'm taking it. There are things I want to say to you, I'm asking you only for the chance to say them."

"You know that I will always give you that chance, Miss Taggart."

"I'm leaving for Utah at once. Tonight. But there's one thing I want you to promise me. Will you promise to wait for me? Will you promise to be there when I arrive?"

"Why ... of course, Miss Taggart. Unless I die or something happens outside my power—but I don't expect it to happen."

"Unless you die, will you wait for me no matter what happens?"

"Of course."

"Do you give me your word that you'll wait?"

"Yes, Miss Taggart."

"Thank you. Good night."

"Good night, Miss Taggart."

She pressed the receiver down and picked it up again in the same sweep of her hand and rapidly dialed a number.

"Eddie? ... Have them hold the Comet for me.... Yes, *tonight's* Comet. Give orders to have my car attached, then come here, to my place, at once." She glanced at her watch. "It's eight-twelve. I have an hour to make it. I don't think I'll hold them up too long. I'll talk to you while I pack."

She hung up and turned to Rearden.

"Tonight?" he said.

"I have to."

"I guess so. Don't you have to go to Colorado, anyway?"

"Yes. I intended to leave tomorrow night. But I think Eddie can manage to take care of my office, and I'd better start now. It takes three days"—she remembered—"it will now take five days to reach Utah. I have to go by train, there are people I have to see on the line—this can't be delayed, either."

"How long will you stay in Colorado?"

"Hard to tell."

"Wire me when you get there, will you? If it looks as if it's going to be long, I'll join you there."

This was the only expression he could give to the words he had desperately wished to say to her, had waited for, had come here to say, and now wished to pronounce more than ever, but knew that it must not be said tonight.

She knew, by a faint, solemn stress in the tone of his voice, that this was his acceptance of her confession, his surrender, his forgiveness. She asked, "Can you leave the mills?"

“It will take me a few days to arrange, but I can.”

He knew what her words were admitting, acknowledging and forgiving him, when she said, “Hank, why don’t you meet me in Colorado in a week? If you fly your plane, we’ll both get there at the same time. And then we’ll come back together.”

“All right ... dearest.”



She dictated a list of instructions, while pacing her bedroom, gathering her clothes, hastily packing a suitcase. Rearden had left; Eddie Willers sat at her dressing table, making notes. He seemed to work in his usual manner of unquestioning efficiency, as if he were not aware of the perfume bottles and powder boxes, as if the dressing table were a desk and the room were only an office.

“I’ll phone you from Chicago, Omaha, Flagstaff and Afton,” she said, tossing underwear into the suitcase. “If you need me in between, call any operator along the line, with orders to flag the train.”

“The Comet?” he asked mildly.

“Hell, yes!—the Comet.”

“Okay.”

“Don’t hesitate to call, if you have to.”

“Okay. But I don’t think I’ll have to.”

“We’ll manage. We’ll work by long-distance phone, just as we did when we —” She stopped.

“—when we were building the John Galt Line?” he asked quietly. They glanced at each other, but said nothing else.

“What’s the latest report on the construction crews?” she asked.

“Everything’s under way. I got word, just after you left the office, that the grading gangs have started—out of Laurel, Kansas, and out of Jasper, Oklahoma. The rail is on its way to them from Silver Springs. It will be all right. The hardest thing to find was—”

“The men?”

“Yes. The men to put in charge. We had trouble out West, over the Elgin to Midland stretch. All the men we were counting on are gone. I couldn’t find anyone able to assume responsibility, neither on our line nor elsewhere. I even tried to get Dan Conway, but—”

“Dan Conway?” she asked, stopping.

“Yes. I did. I tried. Do you remember how he used to have rail laid at the rate of five miles a day, right in that part of the country? Oh, I know he’d have reason to hate our guts, but what does it matter now? I found him—he’s living on a ranch out in Arizona. I phoned him myself and I begged him to save us. Just to take charge, for one night, of building five and a half miles of track. Five and a half miles, Dagny, that we’re stuck with—and he’s the greatest railroad builder living! I told him that I was asking him to do it as a gesture of charity to us, if he would. You know, I think he understood me. He wasn’t angry. He sounded sad. But he wouldn’t do it. He said one must not try to bring people back out of the grave.... He wished me luck. I think he meant it.... You know, I don’t think he’s one of those that the destroyer knocked out. I think he just broke by himself.”

“Yes. I know he did.”

Eddie saw the expression on her face and pulled himself up hastily. “Oh, we finally found a man to put in charge at Elgin,” he said, forcing his voice to sound confident. “Don’t worry, the track will be built long before you get there.”

She glanced at him with the faint suggestion of a smile, thinking of how often she had said these words to him and of the desperate bravery with which he was now trying to tell her: Don’t worry. He caught her glance, he understood, and the answering hint of his smile had a touch of embarrassed apology.

He turned back to his note pad, feeling anger at himself, sensing that he had broken his own unstated commandment: Don’t make it harder for her. He should not have told her about Dan Conway, he thought; he should not have said anything to remind them both of the despair they would feel, if they felt. He wondered what was the matter with him: he thought it inexcusable that he should find his discipline slipping just because this was a room, not an office.

She went on speaking—and he listened, looking down at his pad, making a brief notation once in a while. He did not permit himself to look at her again.

She threw the door of her closet open, jerked a suit off a hanger and folded it rapidly, while her voice went on with unhurried precision. He did not look up, he was aware of her only by means of sound: the sound of the swift movements and of the measured voice. He knew what was wrong with him, he thought; he did not want her to leave, he did not want to lose her again, after so brief a moment of reunion. But to indulge any personal loneliness, at a time when he knew how desperately the railroad needed her in Colorado, was an act of disloyalty he had never committed before—and he felt a vague, desolate sense of guilt.

“Send out orders that the Comet is to stop at every division point,” she said, “and that all division superintendents are to prepare for me a report on—”

He glanced up—then his glance stopped and he did not hear the rest of the

words. He saw a man's dressing gown hanging on the back of the open closet door, a dark blue gown with the white initials HR on its breast pocket.

He remembered where he had seen that gown before, he remembered the man facing him across a breakfast table in the Wayne-Falkland Hotel, he remembered that man coming, unannounced, to her office late on a Thanksgiving night—and the realization that he should have known it, came to him as two subterranean jolts of a single earthquake: it came with a feeling that screamed “No!” so savagely that the scream, not the sight, brought down every girder within him. It was not the shock of the discovery, but the more terrible shock of what it made him discover about himself.

He hung on to a single thought: that he must not let her see what he had noticed or what it had done to him. He felt a sensation of embarrassment magnified to the point of physical torture; it was the dread of violating her privacy twice: by learning her secret and by revealing his own. He bent lower over the note pad and concentrated on an immediate purpose: to stop his pencil from shaking.

“... fifty miles of mountain trackage to build, and we can count on nothing but whatever material we own.”

“I beg your pardon,” he said, his voice barely audible, “I didn’t hear what you said.”

“I said I want a report from all superintendents on every foot of rail and every piece of equipment available on their divisions.”

“Okay.”

“I will confer with each one of them in turn. Have them meet me in my car aboard the Comet.”

“Okay.”

“Send word out—unofficially—that the engineers are to make up time for the stops by going seventy, eighty, a hundred miles an hour, anything they wish as and when they need to, and that I will ... Eddie?”

“Yes. Okay.”

“Eddie, what’s the matter?”

He had to look up, to face her and, desperately, to lie for the first time in his life. “I’m ... I’m afraid of the trouble we’ll get into with the law,” he said.

“Forget it. Don’t you see that there isn’t any law left? Anything goes now, for whoever can get away with it—and, for the moment, it’s we who’re setting the terms.”

When she was ready, he carried her suitcase to a taxicab, then down the platform of the Taggart Terminal to her office car, the last at the end of the Comet. He stood on the platform, saw the train jerk forward and watched the red

markers on the back of her car slipping slowly away from him into the long darkness of the exit tunnel. When they were gone, he felt what one feels at the loss of a dream one had not known till after it was lost.

There were few people on the platform around him and they seemed to move with self-conscious strain, as if a sense of disaster clung to the rails and to the girders above their heads. He thought indifferently that after a century of safety, men were once more regarding the departure of a train as an event involving a gamble with death.

He remembered that he had had no dinner, and he felt no desire to eat, but the underground cafeteria of the Taggart Terminal was more truly his home than the empty cube of space he now thought of as his apartment—so he walked to the cafeteria, because he had no other place to go.

The cafeteria was almost deserted—but the first thing he saw, as he entered, was a thin column of smoke rising from the cigarette of the worker, who sat alone at a table in a dark corner.

Not noticing what he put on his tray, Eddie carried it to the worker's table, said, "Hello," sat down and said nothing else. He looked at the silverware spread before him, wondered about its purpose, remembered the use of a fork and attempted to perform the motions of eating, but found that it was beyond his power. After a while, he looked up and saw that the worker's eyes were studying him attentively.

"No," said Eddie, "no, there's nothing the matter with me.... Oh yes, a lot has happened, but what difference does it make now? ... Yes, she's back.... What else do you want me to say about it? ... How did you know she's back? Oh well, I suppose the whole company knew it within the first ten minutes.... No, I don't know whether I'm glad that she's back.... Sure, she'll save the railroad-for another year or month.... What do you want me to say? ... No, she didn't. She didn't tell me what she's counting on. She didn't tell me what she thought or felt.... Well, how do you suppose she'd feel? It's hell for her—all right, for me, too! Only my kind of hell is my own fault.... No. Nothing. I can't talk about it—talk?—I mustn't even think about it, I've got to stop it, stop thinking of her and—of her, I mean."

He remained silent and he wondered why the worker's eyes—the eyes that always seemed to see everything within him—made him feel uneasy tonight. He glanced down at the table, and he noticed the butts of many cigarettes among the remnants of food on the worker's plate.

"Are you in trouble, too?" asked Eddie. "Oh, just that you've sat here for a long time tonight, haven't you? ... For me? Why should you have wanted to wait for me? ... You know, I never thought you cared whether you saw me or not, me

or anybody, you seemed so complete in yourself, and that's why I liked to talk to you, because I felt that you always understood, but nothing could hurt you—you looked as if nothing had ever hurt you—and it made me feel free, as if ... as if there were no pain in the world.... Do you know what's strange about your face? You look as if you've never known pain or fear or guilt.... I'm sorry I'm so late tonight. I had to see her off—she has just left, on the Comet.... Yes, tonight, just now. ... Yes, she's gone.... Yes, it was a sudden decision—within the past hour. She intended to leave tomorrow night, but something unexpected happened and she had to go at once.... Yes, she's going to Colorado—afterwards.... To Utah—first.... Because she got a letter from Quentin Daniels that he's quitting—and the one thing she won't give up, couldn't stand to give up, is the motor. You remember, the motor I told you about, the remnant that she found.... Daniels? He's a physicist who's been working for the past year, at the Utah Institute of Technology, trying to solve the secret of the motor and to rebuild it.... Why do you look at me like that? ... No, I haven't told you about him before, because it was a secret. It was a private, secret project of her own—and of what interest would it have been to you, anyway? ... I guess I can talk about it now, because he's quit.... Yes, he told her his reasons. He said that he won't give anything produced by his mind to a world that regards him as a slave. He said that he won't be made a martyr to people in exchange for giving them an inestimable benefit.... What—what are you laughing at? ... Stop it, will you? Why do you laugh like that? ... The whole secret? What do you mean, the whole secret? He hasn't found the whole secret of the motor, if that's what you meant, but he seemed to be doing well, he had a good chance. Now it's lost. She's rushing to him, she wants to plead, to hold him, to make him go on—but I think it's useless. Once they stop, they don't come back again. Not one of them has.... No, I don't care, not any more, we've taken so many losses that I'm getting used to it.... Oh no! It's not Daniels that I can't take, it's—no, drop it. Don't question me about it. The whole world is going to pieces, she's still fighting to save it, and I—I sit here damning her for something I had no right to know.... No! She's done nothing to be damned, nothing—and, besides, it doesn't concern the railroad.... Don't pay any attention to me, it's not true, it's not her that I'm damning, it's myself.... Listen, I've always known that you loved Taggart Transcontinental as I loved it, that it meant something special to you, something personal, and that was why you liked to hear me talk about it. But this—the thing I learned today—this has nothing to do with the railroad. It would be of no importance to you. Forget it.... It's something that I didn't know about her, that's all. ... I grew up with her. I thought I knew her. I didn't.... I don't know what it was that I expected. I suppose I just thought that she had no private life of any

kind. To me, she was not a person and not ... not a woman. She was the railroad. And I didn't think that anyone would ever have the audacity to look at her in any other way. ... Well, it serves me right. Forget it.... Forget it, I said! Why do you question me like this? It's only her private life. What can it matter to you? ... Drop it, for God's sake! Don't you see that I can't talk about it? ... Nothing happened, nothing's wrong with me, I just —oh, why am I lying? I can't lie to you, you always seem to see everything, it's worse than trying to lie to myself! ... I *have* lied to myself. I didn't know what I felt for her. The railroad? I'm a rotten hypocrite. If the railroad was all she meant to me, it wouldn't have hit me like this. I wouldn't have felt that I wanted to kill him! ... What's the matter with you tonight? Why do you look at me like that? ... Oh, what's the matter with all of us? Why is there nothing but misery left for anyone? Why do we suffer so much? We weren't meant to. I always thought that we were to be happy, all of us, as our natural fate. What are we doing? What have we lost? A year ago, I wouldn't have damned her for finding something she wanted. But I know that they're doomed, both of them, and so am I, and so is everybody, and she was all I had left.... It was so great, to be alive, it was such a wonderful chance, I didn't know that I loved it and that that was our love, hers and mine and yours—but the world is perishing and we cannot stop it. Why are we destroying ourselves? Who will tell us the truth? Who will save us? Oh, who is John Galt?! ... No, it's no use. It doesn't matter now. Why should I feel anything? We won't last much longer. Why should I care what she does? Why should I care that she's sleeping with Hank Rearden? ... Oh God!—what's the matter with you? Don't go! Where are you going?"

PART III

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CHAPTER V

THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS

On the morning of September 2, a copper wire broke in California, between two telephone poles by the track of the Pacific branch line of Taggart Transcontinental.

A slow, thin rain had been falling since midnight, and there had been no sunrise, only a gray light seeping through a soggy sky—and the brilliant raindrops hanging on the telephone wires had been the only sparks glittering against the chalk of the clouds, the lead of the ocean and the steel of the oil derricks descending as lone bristles down a desolate hillside. The wires had been worn by more rains and years than they had been intended to carry; one of them had kept sagging, through the hours of that morning, under the fragile load of raindrops; then its one last drop had grown on the wire's curve and had hung like a crystal bead, gathering the weight of many seconds; the bead and the wire had given up together and, as soundless as the fall of tears, the wire had broken and fallen with the fall of the bead.

The men at the Division Headquarters of Taggart Transcontinental avoided looking at one another, when the break of the telephone line was discovered and reported. They made statements painfully miscalculated to seem to refer to the problem, yet to state nothing, none fooling the others. They knew that copper wire was a vanishing commodity, more precious than gold or honor; they knew that the division storekeeper had sold their stock of wire weeks ago, to unknown dealers who came by night and were not businessmen in the daytime, but only men who had friends in Sacramento and in Washington—just as the storekeeper, recently appointed to the division, had a friend in New York, named Cuffy Meigs, about whom one asked no questions. They knew that the man who would now assume the responsibility of ordering repairs and initiating the action which would lead to the discovery that the repairs could not be made, would incur retaliation from unknown enemies, that his fellow workers would become mysteriously silent and would not testify to help him, that he would prove nothing, and if he attempted to do his job, it would not be his any longer. They did not know what was safe or dangerous these days, when the guilty were not punished, but the accusers were; and, like animals, they knew that immobility was the only protection when in doubt and in danger. They remained immobile;

they spoke about the appropriate procedure of sending reports to the appropriate authorities on the appropriate dates.

A young roadmaster walked out of the room and out of the headquarters building to the safety of a telephone booth in a drugstore and, at his own expense, ignoring the continent and the tiers of appropriate executives between, he telephoned Dagny Taggart in New York.

She received the call in her brother's office, interrupting an emergency conference. The young roadmaster told her only that the telephone line was broken and that there was no wire to repair it; he said nothing else and he did not explain why he had found it necessary to call her in person. She did not question him; she understood. "Thank you," was all that she answered.

An emergency file in her office kept a record of all the crucial materials still on hand, on every division of Taggart Transcontinental. Like the file of a bankrupt, it kept registering losses, while the rare additions of new supplies seemed like the malicious chuckles of some tormentor throwing crumbs at a starving continent. She looked through the file, closed it, sighed and said, "Montana, Eddie. Phone the Montana Line to ship half their stock of wire to California. Montana might be able to last without it—for another week." And as Eddie Willers was about to protest, she added, "Oil, Eddie. California is one of the last producers of oil left in the country. We don't dare lose the Pacific Line." Then she went back to the conference in her brother's office.

"Copper wire?" said James Taggart, with an odd glance that went from her face to the city beyond the window. "In a very short while, we won't have any trouble about copper."

"Why?" she asked, but he did not answer. There was nothing special to see beyond the window, only the clear sky of a sunny day, the quiet light of early afternoon on the roofs of the city and, above them, the page of the calendar, saying: September 2.

She did not know why he had insisted on holding this conference in his own office, why he had insisted on speaking to her alone, which he had always tried to avoid, or why he kept glancing at his wrist watch.

"Things are, it seems to me, going wrong," he said. "Something has to be done. There appears to exist a state of dislocation and confusion tending toward an unco-ordinated, unbalanced policy. What I mean is, there's a tremendous national demand for transportation, yet we're losing money. It seems to me—"

She sat looking at the ancestral map of Taggart Transcontinental on the wall of his office, at the red arteries winding across a yellowed continent. There had been a time when the railroad was called the blood system of the nation, and the stream of trains had been like a living circuit of blood, bringing growth and

wealth to every patch of wilderness it touched. Now, it was still like a stream of blood, but like the one-way stream that runs from a wound, draining the last of a body's sustenance and life. One-way traffic—she thought indifferently—consumers' traffic.

There was Train Number 193, she thought. Six weeks ago, Train Number 193 had been sent with a load of steel, not to Faulkton, Nebraska, where the Spencer Machine Tool Company, the best machine tool concern still in existence, had been idle for two weeks, waiting for the shipment—but to Sand Creek, Illinois, where Confederated Machines had been wallowing in debt for over a year, producing unreliable goods at unpredictable times. The steel had been allocated by a directive which explained that the Spencer Machine Tool Company was a rich concern, able to wait, while Confederated Machines was bankrupt and could not be allowed to collapse, being the sole source of livelihood of the community of Sand Creek, Illinois. The Spencer Machine Tool Company had closed a month ago. Confederated Machines had closed two weeks later.

The people of Sand Creek, Illinois, had been placed on national relief, but no food could be found for them in the empty granaries of the nation at the frantic call of the moment—so the seed grain of the farmers of Nebraska had been seized by order of the Unification Board—and Train Number 194 had carried the unplanted harvest and the future of the people of Nebraska to be consumed by the people of Illinois. “In this enlightened age,” Eugene Lawson had said in a radio broadcast, “we have come, at last, to realize that each one of us is his brother's keeper.”

“In a precarious period of emergency, like the present,” James Taggart was saying, while she looked at the map, “it is dangerous to find ourselves forced to miss pay days and accumulate wage arrears on some of our divisions, a temporary condition, of course, but—”

She chuckled. “The Railroad Unification Plan isn't

“I beg your pardon?”

“You're to receive a big cut of the Atlantic Southern's gross income, out of the common pool at the end of the year—only there won't be any gross income left for the pool to seize, will there?”

“That's not true! It's just that the bankers are sabotaging the Plan. Those bastards—who used to give us loans in the old days, with no security at all except our own railroad—now refuse to let me have a few measly hundred-thousands, on short term, just to take care of a few payrolls, when I have the entire plant of all the railroads of the country to offer them as security for my loan!”

She chuckled.

“We couldn’t help it!” he cried. “It’s not the fault of the Plan that some people refuse to carry their fair share of our burdens!”

“Jim, was this all you wanted to tell me? If it is, I’ll go. I have work to do.”

His eyes shot to his wrist watch. “No, no, that’s not all! It’s most urgent that we discuss the situation and arrive at some decision, which—”

She listened blankly to the next stream of generalities, wondering about his motive. He was marking time, yet he wasn’t, not fully; she felt certain that he was holding her here for some specific purpose and, simultaneously, that he was holding her for the mere sake of her presence.

It was some new trait in him, which she had begun to notice ever since Cherryl’s death. He had come running to her, rushing, unannounced, into her apartment on the evening of the day when Cherryl’s body had been found and the story of her suicide had filled the newspapers, given by some social worker who had witnessed it; “an inexplicable suicide,” the newspapers had called it, unable to discover any motive. “It wasn’t my fault!” he had screamed to her, as if she were the only judge whom he had to placate. “I’m not to blame for it! I’m not to blame!” He had been shaking with terror—yet she had caught a few glances thrown shrewdly at her face, which had seemed, inconceivably, to convey a touch of triumph. “Get out of here, Jim,” was all she had said to him.

He had never spoken to her again about Cherryl, but he had started coming to her office more often than usual, he had stopped her in the halls for snatches of pointless discussions—and such moments had grown into a sum that gave her an incomprehensible sensation: as if, while clinging to her for support and protection against some nameless terror, his arms were sliding to embrace her and to plunge a knife into her back.

“I am eager to know your views,” he was saying insistently, as she looked away. “It is most urgent that we discuss the situation and ... and you haven’t said anything.” She did not turn. “It’s not as if there were no money to be had out of the railroad business, but—”

She glanced at him sharply; his eyes scurried away.

“What I mean is, some constructive policy has to be devised,” he droned on hastily. “Something has to be done ... by somebody. In times of emergency—”

She knew what thought he had scurried to avoid, what hint he had given her, yet did not want her to acknowledge or discuss. She knew that no train schedules could be maintained any longer, no promises kept, no contracts observed, that regular trains were cancelled at a moment’s notice and transformed into emergency specials sent by unexplained orders to unexpected destinations—and that the orders came from Cuffy Meigs, sole judge of emergencies and of the public welfare. She knew that factories were closing, some with their machinery

stilled for lack of supplies that had not been received, others with their warehouses full of goods that could not be delivered. She knew that the old industries—the giants who had built their power by a purposeful course projected over a span of time—were left to exist at the whim of the moment, a moment they could not foresee or control. She knew that the best among them, those of the longest range and most complex function, had long since gone—and those still struggling to produce, struggling savagely to preserve the code of an age when production had been possible, were now inserting into their contracts a line shameful to a descendant of Nat Taggart: “Transportation permitting.”

And yet there were men—and she knew it—who were able to obtain transportation whenever they wished, as by a mystic secret, as by the grace of some power which one was not to question or explain. They were the men whose dealings with Cuffy Meigs were regarded by people as that unknowable of mystic creeds which smites the observer for the sin of looking, so people kept their eyes closed, dreading, not ignorance, but knowledge. She knew that deals were made whereby those men sold a commodity known as “transportation pull”—a term which all understood, but none would dare define. She knew that these were the men of the emergency specials, the men who could cancel her scheduled trains and send them to any random spot of the continent which they chose to strike with their voodoo stamp, the stamp superseding contract, property, justice, reason and lives, the stamp stating that “the public welfare” required the immediate salvation of that spot. These were the men who sent trains to the relief of the Smather Brothers and their grapefruit in Arizona—to the relief of a factory in Florida engaged in the production of pin-ball machines—to the relief of a horse farm in Kentucky—to the relief of Orren Boyle’s Associated Steel.

These were the men who made deals with desperate industrialists to provide transportation for the goods stalled in their warehouses—or, failing to obtain the percentage demanded, made deals to purchase the goods, when the factory closed, at the bankruptcy sale, at ten cents on the dollar, and to speed the goods away in freight cars suddenly available, away to markets where dealers of the same kind were ready for the kill. These were the men who hovered over factories, waiting for the last breath of a furnace, to pounce upon the equipment—and over desolate sidings, to pounce upon the freight cars of undelivered goods—these were a new biological species, the hit-and-run businessmen, who did not stay in any line of business longer than the span of one deal, who had no payrolls to meet, no overhead to carry, no real estate to own, no equipment to build, whose only asset and sole investment consisted of an item known as “friendship.” These were the men whom official speeches described as “the

progressive businessmen of our dynamic age,” but whom people called “the pull peddlers”—the species included many breeds, those of “transportation pull,” and of “steel pull” and “oil pull” and “wage-raise pull” and “suspended sentence pull”—men who *were* dynamic, who kept darting all over the country while no one else could move, men who were active and mindless, active, not like animals, but like that which breeds, feeds and moves upon the stillness of a corpse.

She knew that there was money to be had out of the railroad business and she knew who was now obtaining it. Cuffy Meigs was selling trains as he was selling the last of the railroad’s supplies, whenever he could rig a setup which would not let it be discovered or proved—selling rail to roads in Guatemala or to trolleyselling wire to manufacturers of juke boxes, selling crossties for fuel in resort hotels.

Did it matter—she thought, looking at the map—which part of the corpse had been consumed by which type of maggot, by those who gorged themselves or by those who gave the food to other maggots? So long as living flesh was prey to be devoured, did it matter whose stomachs it had gone to fill? There was no way to tell which devastation had been accomplished by the humanitarians and which by undisguised gangsters. There was no way to tell which acts of plunder had been prompted by the charity-lust of the Lawsons and which by the gluttony of Cuffy Meigs—no way to tell which communities had been immolated to feed another community one week closer to starvation and which to provide yachts for the pull-peddlers. Did it matter? Both were alike in fact as they were alike in spirit, both were in need and need was regarded as sole title to property, both were acting in strictest accordance with the same code of morality. Both held the immolation of men as proper and both were achieving it. There wasn’t even any way to tell who were the cannibals and who the victims—the communities that accepted as their rightful due the confiscated clothing or fuel of a town to the east of them, found, next week, their granaries confiscated to feed a town to the west—men had achieved the ideal of the centuries, they were practicing it in unobstructed perfection, they were serving need as their highest ruler, need as first claim upon them, need as their standard of value, as the coin of their realm, as more sacred than right and life. Men had been pushed into a pit where, shouting that man is his brother’s keeper, each was devouring his neighbor and was being devoured by his neighbor’s brother, each was proclaiming the righteousness of the unearned and wondering who was stripping the skin off his back, each was devouring himself, while screaming in terror that some unknowable evil was destroying the earth.

“What complaint do they now have to make?” she heard Hugh Akston’s voice

in her mind. “That the universe is irrational? Is it?”

She sat looking at the map, her glance dispassionately solemn, as if no emotion save respect were permissible when observing the awesome power of logic. She was seeing—in the chaos of a perishing continent—the precise, mathematical execution of all the ideas men had held. They had not wanted to know that *this* was what they wanted, they had not wanted to see that they had the power to wish, but not the power to fake—and they had achieved their wish to the letter, to the last bloodstained comma of it.

.What were they thinking now, the champions of need and the lechers of pity?—she wondered. What were they counting on? Those who had once simpered: “I don’t want to destroy the rich, I only want to seize a little of their surplus to help the poor, just a *little*, they’ll never miss it!”—then, later, had snapped: “The tycoons can stand being squeezed, they’ve amassed enough to last them for three generations”—then, later, had yelled: “Why should the people suffer while businessmen have reserves to last a year?”—*now* were screaming: “Why should we starve while some people have reserves to last a week?” What were they counting on?—she wondered.

“You must do something!” cried James Taggart.

She whirled to face him. “*I?*”

“It’s *your* job, it’s your province, it’s your duty!”

“What is?”

“To act. To do.”

“To do—what?”

“How should I know? It’s *your* special talent. You’re the doer.”

She glanced at him: the statement was so oddly perceptive and so incongruously irrelevant. She rose to her feet.

“Is this all, Jim?”

“No! No! I want a discussion!”

“Go ahead.”

“But you haven’t said anything!”

“You haven’t, either.”

“But ... What I mean is, there are practical problems to solve, which ... For instance, what was that matter of our last allocation of new rail vanishing from the storehouse in Pittsburgh?”

“Cuffy Meigs stole it and sold it.”

“Can you prove it?” he snapped defensively.

“Have your friends left any means, methods, rules or agencies of proof?”

“Then don’t talk about it, don’t be theoretical, we’ve got to deal with facts! We’ve got to deal with facts as they are today ... I mean, we’ve got to be realistic

and devise some practical means to protect our supplies under existing conditions, not under unprovable assumptions, which—”

She chuckled. *There* was the form of the formless, she thought, *there* was the method of his consciousness: he wanted her to protect him from Cuffy Meigs without acknowledging Meigs’ existence, to fight it without admitting its reality, to defeat it without disturbing its game.

“What do you find so damn funny?” he snapped angrily.

“You know it.”

“I don’t know what’s the matter with you! I don’t know what’s happened to you ... in the last two months ... ever since you came back.... You’ve never been so unco-operative!”

“Why, Jim, I haven’t argued with you in the last two months.”

“That’s what I mean!” He caught himself hastily, but not fast enough to miss her smile. “I mean, I wanted to have a conference, I wanted to know your view of the situation—”

“You know it.”

“But you haven’t said a word!”

“I said everything I had to say, three years ago. I told you where your course would take you. It has.”

“Now there you go again! What’s the use of theorizing? We’re here, we’re not back three years ago. We’ve got to deal with the present, not the past. Maybe things would have been different, if we had followed your opinion, maybe, but the fact is that we *didn’t*—and we’ve got to deal with facts. We’ve got to take reality as it is now, today!”

“Well, take it.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Take your reality. I’ll merely take your orders.”

“That’s unfair! I’m asking for your opinion—”

“You’re asking for reassurance, Jim. You’re not going to get it.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’m not going to help you pretend—by arguing with you—that the reality you’re talking about is not what it is, that there’s still a way to make it work and to save your neck. There isn’t.”

“Well ...” There was no explosion, no anger—only the feebly uncertain voice of a man on the verge of abdication. “Well ... what would you want me to do?”

“Give up.” He looked at her blankly. “Give up—all of you, you and your Washington friends and your looting planners and the whole of your cannibal philosophy. Give up and get out of the way and let those of us who can, start from scratch out of the ruins.”

“No!” The explosion came, oddly, now; it was the scream of a man who would die rather than betray his idea, and it came from a man who had spent his life evading the existence of ideas, acting with the expediency of a criminal. She wondered whether she had ever understood the essence of criminals. She wondered about the nature of the loyalty to the idea of denying ideas.

“No!” he cried, his voice lower, hoarser and more normal, sinking from the tone of a zealot to the tone of an overbearing executive. “That’s impossible! That’s out of the question!”

“Who said so?”

“Never mind! It’s so! Why do you always think of the impractical? Why don’t you accept reality as it is and do something about it? You’re the realist, you’re the doer, the mover, the producer, the Nat Taggart, you’re the person who’s able to achieve any goal she chooses! You could save us now, you could find a way to make things work—if you *wanted to*!”

She burst out laughing.

There, she thought, was the ultimate goal of all that loose academic prattle which businessmen had ignored for years, the goal of all the slipshod definitions, the sloppy generalities, the soupy abstractions, all claiming that obedience to objective reality is the same as obedience to the State, that there is no difference between a law of nature and a bureaucrat’s directive, that a hungry man is not free, that man must be released from the tyranny of food, shelter and clothing—all of it, for years, that the day might come when Nat Taggart, the realist, would be asked to consider the will of Cuffy Meigs as a fact of nature, irrevocable and absolute like steel, rails and gravitation, to accept the Meigs-made world as an objective, unchangeable reality—then to continue producing abundance in that world. *There* was the goal of all those con men of library and classroom, who sold their revelations as reason, their “instincts” as science, their cravings as knowledge, the goal of all the savages of the non-objective, the non-absolute, the relative, the tentative, the probable—the savages who, seeing a farmer gather a harvest, can consider it only as a mystic phenomenon unbound by the law of causality and created by the farmer’s omnipotent whim, who then proceed to seize the farmer, to chain him, to deprive him of tools, of seeds, of water, of soil, to push him out on a barren rock and to command: “Now grow a harvest and feed us!”

No—she thought, expecting Jim to ask it—it would be useless to try to explain what she was laughing at, he would not be able to understand it.

But he did not ask it. Instead, she saw him slumping and heard him say—terrifyingly, because his words were so irrelevant, if he did not understand, and so monstrous, if he did, “Dagny, I’m your brother ...”

She drew herself up, her muscles growing rigid, as if she were about to face a killer's gun.

"Dagny"—his voice was the soft, nasal, monotonous whine of a beggar—"I want to be president of a railroad. I want it. Why can't I have my wish as you always have yours? Why shouldn't I be given the fulfillment of my desires as you always fulfill any desire of your own? Why should you be happy while I suffer? Oh yes, the world is yours, you're the one who has the brains to run it. Then why do you permit suffering in your world? You proclaim the pursuit of happiness, but you doom me to frustration. Don't I have the right to demand any form of happiness I choose? Isn't that a debt which you owe me? Am I not your brother?"

His glance was like a prowler's flashlight searching her face for a shred of pity. It found nothing but a look of revulsion.

"It's *your* sin if I suffer! It's your moral failure! I'm your brother, therefore I'm your responsibility, but you've failed to supply my wants, therefore you're guilty! All of mankind's moral leaders have said so for centuries—who are you to say otherwise? You're so proud of yourself, you think that you're pure and good—but you can't be good, so long as I'm wretched. My misery is the measure of your sin. My contentment is the measure of your virtue. I want this kind of world, today's world, it gives me my share of authority, it allows me to feel important—make it work for me!—do something!—how do I know what?—it's *your* problem and *your* duty! You have the privilege of strength, but I—I have the *right* of weakness! That's a moral absolute! Don't you know it? Don't you? Don't you?"

His glance was now like the hands of a man hanging over an abyss, groping frantically for the slightest fissure of doubt, but slipping on the clean, polished rock of her face.

"You bastard," she said evenly, without emotion, since the words were not addressed to anything human.

It seemed to her that she saw him fall into the abyss—even though there was nothing to see in his face except the look of a con man whose trick has not worked.

There was no reason to feel more revulsion than usual, she thought; he had merely uttered the things which were preached, heard and accepted everywhere; but this creed was usually expounded in the third person, and Jim had had the open effrontery to expound it in the first. She wondered whether people accepted the doctrine of sacrifice provided its recipients did not identify the nature of their own claims and actions.

She turned to leave.

“No! No! Wait!” he cried, leaping to his feet, with a glance at his wrist watch. “It’s time now! There’s a particular news broadcast that I want you to hear!”

She stopped, held by curiosity.

He pressed the switch of the radio, watching her face openly, intently, almost insolently. His eyes had a look of fear and of oddly lecherous anticipation.

“Ladies and gentlemen!” the voice of the radio speaker leaped forth abruptly; it had a tone of panic. “News of a shocking development has just reached us from Santiago, Chile!”

She saw the jerk of Taggart’s head and a sudden anxiety in his bewildered frown, as if something about the words and voice were not what he had expected.

“A special session of the legislature of the People’s State of Chile had been called for ten o’clock this morning, to pass an act of utmost importance to the people of Chile, Argentina and other South American People’s States. In line with the enlightened policy of Señor Ramirez, the new Head of the Chilean State—who came to power on the moral slogan that man is his brother’s keeper—the legislature was to nationalize the Chilean properties of d’.Anconia Copper, thus opening the way .for the People’s State of Argentina to nationalize the rest of the d’An conia properties the world over. This, however, was known only to a very few of the top-level leaders of both nations. The measure had been kept secret in order to avoid debate and reactionary opposition. The seizure of the multi-billion dollar d’.Anconia Copper was to come as a munificent surprise to the country.

“On the stroke of ten, in the exact moment when the chairman’s gavel struck the rostrum, opening the session—almost as if the gavel’s blow had set it off—the sound of a tremendous explosion rocked the hall, shattering the glass of its windows. It came from the harbor, a few streets away—and when the legislators rushed to the windows, they saw a long column of flame where once there had risen the familiar silhouettes of the ore docks of d.’Anconia Copper. The ore docks had been blown to bits.

“The chairman averted panic and called the session to order. The act of nationalization was read to the assembly, to the sound of fire-alarm sirens and distant cries. It was a gray morning, dark with rain clouds, the explosion had broken an electric transmitter—so that the assembly voted on the measure by the light of candles, while the red glow of the fire kept sweeping over the great vaulted ceiling above their heads.

“But more terrible a shock came later, when the legislators called a hasty recess to announce to the nation the good news that the people now owned d’Anconia Copper. While they were voting, word had come from the closest and farthest points of the globe that there was no d’.Anconia Copper left on earth.

Ladies and gentlemen, not anywhere. In that same instant, on the stroke of ten, by an infernal marvel of synchronization, every property of d.'Anconia Copper on the face of the globe, from Chile to Siam to Spain to Pottsville, Montana, had been blown up and swept away.

"The d.'Anconia workers everywhere had been handed their last pay checks, in cash, at nine A.M., and by nine-thirty had been moved off the premises. The ore docks, the smelters, the laboratories, the office buildings were demolished. Nothing was left of the d.'Anconia ore ships which had been in port—and only lifeboats carrying the crews were left of those ships which had been at sea. As to the d.'Anconia mines, some were buried under tons of blasted rock, while others were found not to be worth the price of blasting. An astounding number of these mines, as reports pouring in seem to indicate, had continued to be run, even though exhausted years ago.

"Among the thousands of d.'Anconia employees, the police have found no one with any knowledge of how this monstrous plot had been conceived, organized and carried out. But the cream of the d.'Anconia staff are not here any longer. The most efficient of the executives, mineralogists, engineers, superintendents have vanished—all the men upon whom the People's State had been counting to carry on the work and cushion the process of readjustment. The most able—*correction*: the most selfish—of the men are gone. Reports from the various banks indicate that there are no d.'Anconia accounts left anywhere; the money has been spent down to the last penny.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the d.'Anconia fortune—the greatest fortune on earth, the legendary fortune of the centuries—has ceased to exist. In place of the golden dawn of a new age, the People's States of Chile and Argentina are left with a pile of rubble and hordes of unemployed on their hands.

"No clue has been found to the fate or the whereabouts of Señor Francisco d.'Anconia. He has vanished, leaving nothing behind him, not even a message of farewell."

Thank you, my darling—thank you in the name of the last of us, even if you will not hear it and will not care to hear.... It was not a sentence, but the silent emotion of a prayer in her mind, addressed to the laughing face of a boy she had known at sixteen.

Then she noticed that she was clinging to the radio, as if the faint electric beat within it still held a tie to the only living force on earth, which it had transmitted for a few brief moments and which now filled the room where all else was dead.

As distant remnants of the explosion's wreckage, she noticed a sound that came from Jim, part-moan, part-scream, part-growl—then the sight of Jim's shoulders shaking over a telephone and his distorted voice screaming, "But,

Rodrigo, you said it was safe! Rodrigo—oh God!—do you know how much I'd sunk into it?"—then the shriek of another phone on his desk, and his voice snarling into another receiver, his hand still clutching the first, "Shut your trap, Orren! What are you to do? What do I care, God damn you!"

There were people rushing into the office, the telephones were screaming and, alternating between pleas and curses, Jim kept yelling into one receiver, "Get me Santiago! ... Get Washington to get me Santiago!"

Distantly, as on the margin of her mind, she could see what sort of game the men behind the shrieking phones had played and lost. They seemed far away, like tiny commas squirming on the white field under the lens of a microscope. She wondered how they could ever expect to be taken seriously when a Francisco d.'Anconia was possible on earth.

She saw the glare of the explosion in every face she met through the rest of the day—and in every face she passed in the darkness of the streets, that evening. If Francisco had wanted a worthy funeral pyre for d.'Anconia Copper, she thought, he had succeeded. There it was, in the streets of New York City, the only city on earth still able to understand it—in the faces of people, in their whispers, the whispers crackling tensely like small tongues of fire, the faces lighted by a look that was both solemn and frantic, the shadings of expressions appearing to sway and weave, as if cast by a distant flame, some frightened, some angry, most of them uneasy, uncertain, expectant, but all of them acknowledging a fact much beyond an industrial catastrophe, all of them knowing what it meant, though none would name its meaning, all of them carrying a touch of laughter, a laughter of amusement and defiance, the bitter laughter of perishing victims who feel that they are avenged.

She saw it in the face of Hank Rearden, when she met him for dinner that evening. As his tall, confident figure walked toward her—the only figure that seemed at home in the costly setting of a distinguished restaurant—she saw the look of eagerness fighting the sternness of his features, the look of a young boy still open to the enchantment of the unexpected. He did not speak of this day's event, but she knew that it was the only image in his mind.

They had been meeting whenever he came to the city, spending a brief, rare evening together—with their past still alive in their silent acknowledgment—with no future in their work and in their common struggle, but with the knowledge that they were allies gaining support from the fact of each other's existence.

He did not want to mention today's event, he did not want to speak of Francisco, but she noticed, as they sat at the table, that the strain of a resisted smile kept pulling at the hollows of his cheeks. She knew whom he meant, when

he said suddenly, his voice soft and low with the weight of admiration, “He did keep his oath, didn’t he?”

“His *oath*?” she asked, startled, thinking of the inscription on the temple of Atlantis.

“He said to me, ‘I swear—by the woman I love—that I am your friend.’ He was.”

“He is.”

He shook his head. “I have no right to think of him. I have no right to accept what he’s done as an act in my defense. And yet ...” He stopped.

“But it was, Hank. In defense of all of us—and of you, most of all.”

He looked away, out at the city. They sat at the side of the room, with a sheet of glass as an invisible protection against the sweep of space and streets sixty floors below. The city seemed abnormally distant: it lay flattened down to the pool of its lowest stories. A few blocks away, its tower merging into darkness, the calendar hung at the level of their faces, not as a small, disturbing rectangle, but as an enormous screen, eerily close and large, flooded by the dead, white glow of light projected through an empty film, empty but for the letters: September 2.

“Rearden Steel is now working at capacity,” he was saying indifferently. “They’ve lifted the production quotas off my mills—for the next five minutes, I guess. I don’t know how many of their own regulations they’ve suspended, I don’t think they know it, either, they don’t bother keeping track of legality any longer, I’m sure I’m a law-breaker on five or six counts, which nobody could prove or disprove—all I know is that the gangster of the moment told me to go full steam ahead.” He shrugged. “When another gangster kicks him out tomorrow, I’ll probably be shut down, as penalty for illegal operation. But according to the plan of the present split-second, they’ve begged me to keep pouring my Metal, in any amount and by any means I choose.”

She noticed the occasional, surreptitious glances that people were throwing in their direction. She had noticed it before, ever since her broadcast, ever since the two of them had begun to appear in public together. Instead of the disgrace he had dreaded, there was an air of awed uncertainty in people’s manner—uncertainty of their own moral precepts, awe in the presence of two persons who dared to be certain of being right. People were looking at them with anxious curiosity, with envy, with respect, with the fear of offending an unknown, proudly rigorous standard, some almost with an air of apology that seemed to say: “Please forgive us for being married.” There were some who had a look of angry malice, and a few who had a look of admiration.

“Dagny,” he asked suddenly, “do you suppose he’s in New York?”

“No. I’ve called the Wayne-Falkland. They told me that the lease on his suite had expired a month ago and he did not renew it.”

“They’re looking for him all over the world,” he said, smiling. “They’ll never find him.” The smile vanished. “Neither will I.” His voice slipped back to the flat, gray tone of duty: “Well, the mills are working, but I’m not. I’m doing nothing but running around the country like a scavenger, searching for illegal ways to purchase raw materials. Hiding, sneaking, lying—just to get a few tons of ore or coal or copper. They haven’t lifted their regulations off my raw materials. They know that I’m pouring more Metal than the quotas they give me could produce. They don’t care.” He added, “They think I do.”

“Tired, Hank?”

“Bored to death.”

There was a time, she thought, when his mind, his energy, his inexhaustible resourcefulness had been given to the task of a producer devising better ways to deal with nature; now, they were switched to the task of a criminal outwitting men. She wondered how long a man could endure a change of that kind.

“It’s becoming almost impossible to get iron ore,” he said indifferently, then added, his voice suddenly alive, “Now it’s going to be completely impossible to get copper.” He was grinning.

She wondered how long a man could continue to work against himself, to work when his deepest desire was not to succeed, but to fail.

She understood the connection of his thoughts when he said, “I’ve never told you, but I’ve met Ragnar Danneskjöld.”

“He told me.”

“*What?* Where did you ever—” He stopped. “Of course,” he said, his voice tense and low. “He would be one of them. You would have met him. Dagny, what are they like, those men who ... No. Don’t answer me.” In a moment he added, “So I’ve met one of their agents.”

“You’ve met two of them.”

His response was a span of total stillness. “Of course,” he said dully. “I knew it ... I just wouldn’t admit to myself that I knew ... He was their recruiting agent, wasn’t he?”

“One of their earliest and best.”

He chuckled; it was a sound of bitterness and longing. “That night ... when they got Ken Danagger ... I thought that they had not sent anyone after *me*....”

The effort by which he made his face grow rigid, was almost like the slow, resisted turn of a key locking a sunlit room he could not permit himself to examine. After a while, he said impassively, “Dagny, that new rail we discussed last month—I don’t think I’ll be able to deliver it. They haven’t lifted their

regulations off my output, they're still controlling my sales and disposing of my Metal as they please. But the bookkeeping is in such a snarl that I'm smuggling a few thousand tons into the black market every week. I think they know it. They're pretending not to. They don't want to antagonize me, right now. But, you see, I've been shipping every ton I could snatch, to some emergency customers of mine. Dagny, I was in Minnesota last month. I've seen what's going on there. The country will starve, not next year, but *this* winter, unless a few of us act and act fast. There are no grain reserves left anywhere. With Nebraska gone, Oklahoma wrecked, North Dakota abandoned, Kansas barely subsisting—there isn't going to be any wheat this winter, not for the city of New York nor for any Eastern city. Minnesota is our last granary. They've had two bad years in succession, but they have a bumper crop this fall—and they have to be able to harvest it. Have you had a chance to take a look at the condition of the farm-equipment industry? They're not big enough, any of them, to keep a staff of efficient gangsters in Washington or to pay percentages to pull-peddlers. So they haven't been getting many allocations of materials. Two-thirds of them have shut down and the rest are about to. And farms are perishing all over the country—for lack of tools. You should have seen those farmers in Minnesota. They've been spending more time fixing old tractors that can't be fixed than plowing their fields. I don't know how they managed to survive till last spring. I don't know how they managed to plant their wheat. But they did. They did." There was a look of intensity on his face, as if he were contemplating a rare, forgotten sight: a vision of *men*—and she knew what motive was still holding him to his job. "Dagny, they had to have tools for their harvest. I've been selling all the Metal I could steal out of my own mills to the manufacturers of farm equipment. On credit. They've been sending the equipment to Minnesota as fast as they could put it out. Selling it in the same way—illegally and on credit. But they will be paid, this fall, and so will I. Charity, hell! We're helping producers—and what tenacious producers!—not lousy, mooching 'consumers.' We're giving *loans*, not alms. We're supporting *ability*, not *need*. I'll be damned if I'll stand by and let those men be destroyed while the pull-peddlers grow rich!"

He was looking at the image of a sight he had seen in Minnesota: the silhouette of an abandoned factory, with the light of the sunset streaming, unopposed, through the holes of its windows and the cracks of its roof, with the remnant of a sign: Ward Harvester Company.

"Oh, I know," he said. "We'll save them this winter, but the looters will devour them next year. Still, we'll save them this winter.... Well, that's why I won't be able to smuggle any rail for you. Not in the immediate future—and there's nothing left to us but the immediate future. I don't know what is the use

of feeding a country, if it loses its railroads—but what is the use of railroads where there is no food? What is the use, anyway?”

“It’s all right, Hank. We’ll last with such rail as we have, for—” She stopped.

“For a month?”

“For the winter—I hope.”

Cutting across their silence, a shrill voice reached them from another table, and they turned to look at a man who had the jittery manner of a cornered gangster about to reach for his gun. “An act of anti-social destruction,” he was snarling to a sullen companion, “at a time when there’s such a desperate shortage of copper! ... We can’t permit it! We can’t permit it to be true!”

Rearden turned abruptly to look off, at the city. “I’d give anything to know where he is,” he said, his voice low. “Just to know where he is, right now, at this moment.”

“What would you do, if you knew it?”

He dropped his hand in a gesture of futility. “I wouldn’t approach him. The only homage I can still pay him is not to cry for forgiveness where no forgiveness is possible.”

They remained silent. They listened to the voices around them, to the splinters of panic trickling through the luxurious room.

She had not been aware that the same presence seemed to be an invisible guest at every table, that the same subject kept breaking through the attempts at any other conversation. People sat in a manner, not quite of cringing, but as if they found the room too large and too exposed—a room of glass, blue velvet, aluminum and gentle lighting. They looked as if they had come to this room at the price of countless evasions, to let it help them pretend that theirs was still a civilized existence—but an act of primeval violence had blasted the nature of their world into the open and they were no longer able not to .see.

“How could he? How could he?” a woman was demanding with petulant terror. “He had no right to do it!”

“It was an accident,” said a young man with a staccato voice and an odor of public payroll. “It was a chain of coincidences, as any statistical curve of probabilities can easily prove. It is unpatriotic to spread rumors exaggerating the power of the people’s enemies.”

“Right and wrong is all very well for academic conversations,” said a woman with a schoolroom voice and a barroom mouth, “but how can anybody take his own ideas seriously enough to destroy a fortune when people need it?”

“I don’t understand it,” an old man was saying with quavering bitterness. “After centuries of efforts to curb man’s innate brutality, after centuries of teaching, training and indoctrination with the gentle and the humane!”

A woman's bewildered voice rose uncertainly and trailed off: "I thought we were living in an age of brotherhood ..."

"I'm scared," a young girl was repeating, "I'm scared ... oh, I don't know! ... I'm just scared ..."

"He couldn't have done it!" ... "He did!" ... "But why?" ... "I refuse to believe it!" ... "It's not human!" ... "But why?" ... "Just a worthless playboy!" ... "But why?"

The muffled scream of a woman across the room and some half-grasped signal on the edge of Dagny's vision, came simultaneously and made her whirl to look at the city.

The calendar was run by a mechanism locked in a room behind the screen, unrolling the same film year after year, projecting the dates in steady rotation, in changeless rhythm, never moving but on the stroke of midnight. The speed of Dagny's turn gave her time to see a phenomenon as unexpected as if a planet had reversed its orbit in the sky: she saw the words "September 2" moving upward and vanishing past the edge of the screen.

Then, written across the enormous page, stopping time, as a last message to the world and to the world's motor which was New York, she saw the lines of a sharp, intransigent handwriting: .

Brother, you asked for it!

Francisco Domingo Carlos Andres Sebastian d.'Anconia

She did not know which shock was greater: the sight of the message or the sound of Rearden's laughter—Rearden, standing on his feet, in full sight and hearing of the room behind him, laughing above their moans of panic, laughing in greeting, in salute, in acceptance of the gift he had tried to reject, in release, in triumph, in surrender.

* * *

On the evening of September 7, a copper wire broke in Montana, stopping the motor of a loading crane on a spur track of Taggart Transcontinental, at the rim of the Stanford Copper Mine.

The mine had been working on three shifts, its days and nights blending into a single stretch of struggle to lose no minute, no drop of copper it could squeeze from the shelves of a mountain into the nation's industrial desert. The crane broke down at the task of loading a train; it stopped abruptly and hung still

against the evening sky, between a string of empty cars and piles of suddenly immovable ore.

The men of the railroad and of the mine stopped in dazed bewilderment: they found that in all the complexity of their equipment, among the drills, the motors, the derricks, the delicate gauges, the ponderous floodlights beating down into the pits and ridges of a mountain—there was no wire to mend the crane. They stopped, like men on an ocean liner propelled by ten-thousand-horsepower generators, but perishing for lack of a safety pin.

The station agent, a young man with a swift body and a brusque voice, stripped the wiring from the station building and set the crane in motion again—and while the ore went clattering to fill the cars, the light of candles came trembling through the dusk from the windows of the station.

“Minnesota, Eddie,” said Dagny grimly, closing the drawer of her special file. “Tell the Minnesota Division to ship half their stock of wire to Montana.” “But good God, Dagny!—with the peak of the harvest rush approaching—” “They’ll hold through it—I think. We don’t dare lose a single supplier of copper.”

“But I have!” screamed James Taggart, when she reminded him once more. “I have obtained for you the top priority on copper wire, the first claim, the uppermost ration level, I’ve given you all the cards, certificates, documents and requisitions—what else do you want?” “The copper wire.” “I’ve done all I could! Nobody can blame me!”

She did not argue. The afternoon newspaper was lying on his desk—and she was staring at an item on the back page: An Emergency State Tax had been passed in California for the relief of the state’s unemployed, in the amount of fifty per cent of any local corporation’s gross income ahead of other taxes; the California oil companies had gone .out of business.

“Don’t worry, Mr. Rearden,” said an unctuous voice over a long-distance telephone line from Washington, “I just wanted to assure you that you will not have to worry.” “About what?” asked Rearden, baffled. “About that temporary bit of confusion in California. We’ll straighten it out in no time, it was an act of illegal insurrection, their state government had no right to impose local taxes detrimental to national taxes, we’ll negotiate an equitable arrangement immediately—but in the meantime, if you have been disturbed by any unpatriotic rumors about the California oil companies, I just wanted to tell you that Rearden Steel has been placed in the top category of essential need, with first claim upon any oil available anywhere in the nation, very top category, Mr. Rearden—so I just wanted you to know that you won’t have to worry about the problem of fuel this winter!”

Rearden hung up the telephone receiver, with a frown of worry, not about the

problem of fuel and the end of the California oil fields— disasters of this kind had become habitual—but about the fact that the Washington planners found it necessary to placate him. This was new; he wondered what it meant. Through the years of his struggle, he had learned that an apparently causeless antagonism was not hard to deal with, but an apparently causeless solicitude was an ugly danger. The same wonder struck him again, when, walking down an alley between the mill structures, he caught sight of a slouching figure whose posture combined an air of insolence with an air of expecting to be swatted: it was his brother Philip.

Ever since he had moved to Philadelphia, Rearden had not visited his former home and had not heard a word from his family, whose bills he went on paying. Then, inexplicably, twice in the last few weeks, he had caught Philip wandering through the mills for no apparent reason. He had been unable to tell whether Philip was sneaking to avoid him or waiting to catch his attention; it had looked like both. He had been unable to discover any clue to Philip's purpose, only some incomprehensible solicitude, of a kind Philip had never displayed before.

The first time, in answer to his startled "What are you doing here?" -Philip had said vaguely, "Well, I know that you don't like me to come to your office." "What do you want?" "Oh, nothing ... but ... well, Mother is worried about you." "Mother can call me any time she wishes." Philip had not answered, but had proceeded to question him, in an unconvincingly casual manner, about his work, his health, his business; the questions had kept hitting oddly beside the point, not questions about business, but more about his, Rearden's, feelings toward business. Rearden had cut him short and waved him away, but had been left with the small, nagging sense of an incident that remained inexplicable.

The second time, Philip had said, as sole explanation, "We just want to know how you feel." "Who's we?" "Why ... Mother and I. These are difficult times and ... well, Mother wants to know how you feel about it all." "Tell her that I don't." The words had seemed to hit Philip in some peculiar manner, almost as if this were the one answer he dreaded. "Get out of here," Rearden had ordered wearily, "and the next time you want to see me, make an appointment and come to my office. But don't come unless you have something to say. This is not a place where one discusses feelings, mine or anybody else's."

Philip had not called for an appointment—but now there he was again, slouching among the giant shapes of the furnaces, with an air of guilt and snobbishness together, as if he were both snooping and slum ming.

"But I do have something to say! I do!" he cried hastily, in answer to the angry frown on Rearden's face.

"Why didn't you come to my office?"

“You don’t want me in your office.”

“I don’t want you here, either.”

“But I’m only ... I’m only trying to be considerate and not to take your time when you’re so busy and ... you are very busy, aren’t you?”

“And?”

“And ... well, I just wanted to catch you in a spare moment ... to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“I ... Well, I need a job.”

He said it belligerently and drew back a little. Rearden stood looking at him blankly.

“Henry, I want a job. I mean, here, at the mills. I want you to give me something to do. I need a job, I need to earn my living, I’m tired of alms.” He was groping for something to say, his voice both offended and pleading, as if the necessity to justify the plea were an unfair imposition upon him. “I want a livelihood of my own, I’m not asking you for charity, I’m asking you to give me a chance!”

“This is a factory, Philip, not a gambling joint.”

“Uh?”

“We don’t take chances or give them.”

“I’m asking you to give me a *job*!”

“Why should I?”

“Because I need it!”

Rearden pointed to the red spurts of flame shooting from the black shape of a furnace, shooting safely into space four hundred feet of steel-clay-and-steam-embodied thought above them. “I needed that furnace, Philip. It wasn’t my need that gave it to me.”

Philip’s face assumed a look of not having heard. “You’re not officially supposed to hire anybody, but that’s just a technicality, if you’ll put me on, my friends will okay it without any trouble and—” Something about Rearden’s eyes made him stop abruptly, then ask in an angrily impatient voice, “Well, what’s the matter? What have I said that’s wrong?”

“What you haven’t said.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“What you’re squirming to leave unmentioned.”

“What?”

“That you’d be of no use to me whatever.”

“Is that what you—” Philip started with automatic righteousness, but stopped and did not finish.

“Yes,” said Rearden, smiling, “*that’s* what I think of first.”

Philip's eyes oozed away; when he spoke, his voice sounded as if it were darting about at random, picking stray sentences: "Everybody is entitled to a livelihood ... How am I going to get it, if nobody gives me my chance?"

"How did I get mine?"

"I wasn't born owning a steel plant."

"Was I?"

"I can do anything you can—if you'll teach me."

"Who taught me?"

"Why do you keep saying that? I'm not talking about you!"

"I am."

In a moment, Philip muttered, "What do you have to worry about? It's not *your* livelihood that's in question!"

Rearden pointed to the figures of men in the steaming rays of the furnace. "Can you do what they're doing?"

"I don't see what you're—"

"What will happen if I put you there and you ruin a heat of steel for .me?"

"What's more important, that your damn steel gets poured or that I .eat?"

"How do you propose to eat if the steel doesn't get poured?"

Philip's face assumed a look of reproach. "I'm not in a position to argue with you right now, since you hold the upper hand."

"Then don't argue."

"Uh?"

"Keep your mouth shut and get out of here."

"But I meant—" He stopped.

Rearden chuckled. "You meant that it's I who should keep my mouth shut, because I hold the upper hand, and should give in to you, because you hold no hand at all?"

"That's a peculiarly crude way of stating a moral principle."

"But that's what your moral principle amounts to, doesn't it?"

"You can't discuss morality in materialistic terms."

"We're discussing a job in a steel plant—and, boy! is that a materialistic place!"

Philip's body drew a shade tighter together and his eyes became a shade more glazed, as if in fear of the place around him, in resentment of its sight, in an effort not to concede its reality. He said, in the soft, stubborn whine of a voodoo incantation, "It's a moral imperative, universally conceded in our day and age, that every man is entitled to a job." His voice rose: "I'm entitled to it!"

"You are? Go on, then, collect your claim."

"Uh?"

“Collect your job. Pick it off the bush where you think it grows.”

“I mean—”

“You mean that it doesn’t? You mean that you need it, but can’t create it? You mean that you’re entitled to a job which I must create for you?”

“Yes!”

“And if I don’t?”

The silence went stretching through second after second. “I don’t understand you,” said Philip; his voice had the angry bewilderment of a man who recites the formulas of a well-tested role, but keeps getting the wrong cues in answer. “I don’t understand why one can’t talk to you any more. I don’t understand what sort of theory you’re propounding and—”

“Oh yes, you do.”

As if refusing to believe that the formulas could fail, Philip burst out with: “Since when did you take to abstract philosophy? You’re only a businessman, you’re not qualified to deal with questions of principle, you ought to leave it to the experts who have conceded for centuries—”

“Cut it, Philip. What’s the gimmick?”

“Gimmick?”

“Why the sudden ambition?”

“Well, at a time like this ...”

“Like what?”

“Well, every man has the right to have some means of support and ... and not be left to be tossed aside ... When things are so uncertain, a man’s got to have some security ... some foothold ... I mean, at a time like this, if anything happened to you, I’d have no—”

“What do you expect to happen to me?”

“Oh, I don’t! I don’t!” The cry was oddly, incomprehensibly genuine. “Nothing to happen! ... Do you?”

“Such as what?”

“How do I know? ... But I’ve got nothing except the pittance you give me and ... and you might change your mind any time.”

“I might.”

“And I haven’t any hold on you at all.”

“Why did it take you that many years to realize it and start worrying? Why now?”

“Because ... because you’ve changed. You ... you used to have a sense of duty and moral responsibility, but ... you’re losing it. You’re losing it, aren’t you?”

Rearden stood studying him silently; there was something peculiar in Philip’s manner of sliding toward questions, as if his words were accidental, but the too

casual, the faintly insistent questions were the key to his purpose.

“Well, I’ll be glad to take the burden off your shoulders, if I’m a burden to you!” Philip snapped suddenly. “Just give me a job, and your conscience won’t have to bother you about me any longer!”

“It doesn’t.”

“That’s what I mean! You don’t care. You don’t care what becomes of any of us, do you?”

“Of whom?”

“Why ... Mother and me and ... and mankind in general. But I’m not going to appeal to your better self. I know that you’re ready to ditch me at a moment’s notice, so—”

“You’re lying, Philip. That’s not what you’re worried about. If it were, you’d be angling for a chunk of cash, not for a job, not—”

“No! I want a job!” The cry was immediate and almost frantic. “Don’t try to buy me off with cash! I want a job!”

“Pull yourself together, you poor louse. Do you hear what you’re saying?”

Philip spit out his answer with impotent hatred: “You can’t talk to me that way!”

“Can you?”

“I only—”

“To buy you off? Why should I try to buy you off—instead of kicking you out, as I should have, years ago?”

“Well, after all, I’m your brother!”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“One’s supposed to have some sort of feeling for one’s brother.”

“Do you?”

Philip’s mouth swelled petulantly; he did not answer; he waited; Rearden let him wait. Philip muttered, “You’re supposed ... at least ... to have some consideration for my feelings ... but you haven’t.”

“Have you for mine?”

“Yours? Your *feelings*?” It was not malice in Philip’s voice, but worse: it was a genuine, indignant astonishment. “You haven’t any feelings. You’ve never felt anything at all. You’ve never *suffered*!”

It was as if a sum of years hit Rearden in the face, by means of a sensation and a sight: the exact sensation of what he had felt in the cab of the first train’s engine on the John Gait Line—and the sight of Philip’s eyes, the pale, half-liquid eyes presenting the uttermost of human degradation : an uncontested pain, and, with the obscene insolence of a skeleton toward a living being, demanding that this pain be held as the highest of values. You’ve never suffered, the eyes

were saying to him accusingly—while he was seeing the night in his office when his ore mines were taken away from him—the moment when he had signed the Gift Certificate surrendering Rearden Metal—the month of days inside a plane that searched for the remains of Dagny’s body. You’ve never suffered, the eyes were saying with self-righteous scorn—while he remembered the sensation of proud chastity with which he had fought through those moments, refusing to surrender to pain, a sensation made of his love, of his loyalty, of his knowledge that joy is the goal of existence, and joy is not to be stumbled upon, but to be achieved, and the act of treason is to let its vision drown in the swamp of the moment’s torture. You’ve never suffered, the dead stare of the eyes was saying, you’ve never felt anything, because only to suffer is to feel—there’s no such thing as joy, there’s only pain and the absence of pain, only pain and the zero, when one feels nothing—I suffer, I’m twisted by suffering, I’m made of undiluted suffering, that’s my purity, that’s my virtue—and yours, you the untwisted one, you the uncomplaining, yours is to relieve me of my pain—cut your unsuffering body to patch up mine, cut your unfeeling soul to stop mine from feeling—and we’ll achieve the ultimate ideal, the triumph over life, the zero! He was seeing the nature of those who, for centuries, had not recoiled from the preachers of annihilation—he was seeing the nature of the enemies he had been fighting all his life.

“Philip,” he said, “get out of here.” His voice was like a ray of sunlight in a morgue, it was the plain, dry, daily voice of a businessman, the sound of health, addressed to an enemy one could not honor by anger, nor even by horror. “And don’t ever try to enter these mills again, because there will be orders at every gate to throw you out, if you try it.”

“Well, after all,” said Philip, in the angry and cautious tone of a tentative threat, “I could have my friends assign me to a job here and *compel* you to accept it!”

Rearden had started to go, but he stopped and turned to look at his brother.

Philip’s moment of grasping a sudden revelation was not accomplished by means of thought, but by means of that dark sensation which was his only mode of consciousness: he felt a sensation of terror, squeezing his throat, shivering down into his stomach—he was seeing the spread of the mills, with the roving streamers of flame, with the ladles of molten metal sailing through space on delicate cables, with open pits the color of glowing coal, with cranes coming at his head, pounding past, holding tons of steel by the invisible power of magnets—and he knew that he was afraid of this place, afraid to the death, that he dared not move without the protection and guidance of the man before him—then he looked at the tall, straight figure standing casually still, the figure with the

unflinching eyes whose sight had cut through rock and flame to build this place—and then he knew how easily the man he was proposing to compel could let a single bucket of metal tilt over a second ahead of its time or let a single crane drop its load a foot short of its goal, and there would be nothing left of him, of Philip the claimant—and his only protection lay in the fact that his mind would think of such actions, but the mind of Hank Rearden would not.

“But we’d better keep it on a friendly basis,” said Philip.

“You’d better,” said Rearden and walked away.

Men who worship pain—thought Rearden, staring at the image of the enemies he had never been able to understand—they’re men who worship pain. It seemed monstrous, yet peculiarly devoid of importance. He felt nothing. It was like trying to summon emotion toward inanimate objects, toward refuse sliding down a mountainside to crush him. One could flee from the slide or build retaining walls against it or be crushed—but one could not grant any anger, indignation or moral concern to the senseless motions of the un-living; no, worse, he thought—the anti-living.

The same sense of detached unconcern remained with him while he sat in a Philadelphia courtroom and watched men perform the motions which were to grant him his divorce. He watched them utter mechanical generalities, recite vague phrases of fraudulent evidence, play an intricate game of stretching words to convey no facts and no meaning. He had paid them to do it—he whom the law permitted no other way to gain his freedom, no right to state the facts and plead the truth—the law which delivered his fate, not to objective rules objectively defined, but to the arbitrary mercy of a judge with a wizened face and a look of empty cunning.

Lillian was not present in the courtroom; her attorney made gestures once in a while, with the energy of letting water run through his fingers. They all knew the verdict in advance and they knew its reason; no other reason had existed for years, where no standards, save whim, had existed. They seemed to regard it as their rightful prerogative; they acted as if the purpose of the procedure were not to try a case, but to give them jobs, as if their jobs were to recite the appropriate formulas with no responsibility to know what the formulas accomplished, as if a courtroom were the one place where questions of right and wrong were irrelevant and they, the men in charge of dispensing justice, were safely wise enough to know that no justice existed. They acted like savages performing a ritual devised to set them free of objective reality.

But the ten years of his marriage had been real, he thought—and these were the men who assumed the power to dispose of it, to decide whether he would have a chance of contentment on earth or be condemned to torture for the rest of

his lifetime. He remembered the austere pitiless respect he had felt for his contract of marriage, for all his contracts and all his legal obligations—and he saw what sort of legality his scrupulous observance was expected to serve.

He noticed that the puppets of the courtroom had started by glancing at him in the sly, wise manner of fellow conspirators sharing a common guilt, mutually safe from moral condemnation. Then, when they observed that he was the only man in the room who looked steadily straight at anyone's face, he saw resentment growing in their eyes. Incredulously, he realized what it was that had been expected of him: he, the victim, chained, bound, gagged and left with no recourse save to bribery, had been expected to believe that the farce he had purchased was a process of law, that the edicts enslaving him had moral validity, that he was guilty of corrupting the integrity of the guardians of justice, and that the blame was his, not theirs. It was like blaming the victim of a holdup for corrupting the integrity of the thug. And yet—he thought—through all the generations of political extortion, it was not the looting bureaucrats who had taken the blame, but the chained industrialists, not the men who peddled legal favors, but the men who were forced to buy them; and through all those generations of crusades against corruption, the remedy had always been, not the liberating of the victims, but the granting of wider powers for extortion to the extortionists. The only guilt of the victims, he thought, had been that they accepted it as guilt.

When he walked out of the courtroom into the chilly drizzle of a gray afternoon, he felt as if he had been divorced, not only from Lillian, but from the whole of the human society that supported the procedure he had witnessed.

The face of his attorney, an elderly man of the old-fashioned school, wore an expression that made it look as if he longed to take a bath. "Say, Hank," he asked as sole comment, "is there something the looters are anxious to get from you right now?" "Not that I know of. Why?" "The thing went too smoothly. There were a few points at which I expected pressure and hints for some extras, but the boys sailed past and took no advantage of it. Looks to me as if orders had come from on high to treat you gently and let you have your way. Are they planning something new against your mills?" "Not that I know of," said Rearden—and was astonished to hear in his mind: Not that I care.

It was on the same afternoon, at the mills, that he saw the Wet Nurse hurrying toward him—a gangling, coltish figure with a peculiar mixture of brusqueness, awkwardness and decisiveness.

"Mr. Rearden, I would like to speak to you." His voice was diffident, yet oddly firm.

"Go ahead."

“There’s something I want to ask you.” The boy’s face was solemn and taut. “I want you to know that I know you should refuse me, but I want to ask it just the same ... and ... and if it’s presumptuous, then just tell me to go to hell.”

“Okay. Try it.”

“Mr. Rearden, would you give me a job?” It was the effort to sound normal that betrayed the days of struggle behind the question. “I want to quit what I’m doing and go to work. I mean, real work—in steel-making, like I thought I’d started to, once. I want to earn my keep. I’m tired of being a bedbug.”

Rearden could not resist smiling and reminding him, in the tone of a quotation, “Now why use such words, Non-Absolute? If we don’t use ugly words, we won’t have any ugliness and—” But he saw the desperate earnestness of the boy’s face and stopped, his smile vanishing.

“I mean it, Mr. Rearden. And I know what the word means and it’s the right word. I’m tired of being paid, with your money, to do nothing except make it impossible for you to make any money at all. I know that anyone who works today is only a sucker for bastards like me, but ... well, God damn it, I’d rather be a sucker, if that’s all there’s left to be!” His voice had risen to a cry. “I beg your pardon, Mr. Rearden,” he said stiffly, looking away. In a moment, he went on in his woodenly unemotional tone. “I want to get out of the Deputy-Director-of-Distribution racket. I don’t know that I’d be of much use to you, I’ve got a college diploma in metallurgy, but that’s not worth the paper it’s printed on. But I think I’ve learned a little about the work in the two years I’ve been here—and if you could use me at all, as sweeper or scrap man or whatever you’d trust me with, I’d tell them where to put the deputy directorship and I’d go to work for you tomorrow, next week, this minute or whenever you say.” He avoided looking at Rearden, not in a manner of evasion, but as if he had no right to do it.

“Why were you afraid to ask me?” said Rearden gently.

The boy glanced at him with indignant astonishment, as if the answer were self-evident. “Because after the way I started here and the way I acted and what I’m deputy of, if I come asking you for favors, you ought to kick me in the teeth!”

“You *have* learned a great deal in the two years you’ve been here.”

“No, I—” He glanced at Rearden, understood, looked away and said woodenly, “Yeah ... if that’s what you mean.”

“Listen, kid, I’d give you a job this minute and I’d trust you with more than a sweeper’s job, if it were up to me. But have you forgotten the Unification Board? I’m not allowed to hire you and you’re not allowed to quit. Sure, men are quitting all the time, and we’re hiring others under phony names and fancy papers proving that they’ve worked here for years. You know it, and thanks for

keeping your mouth shut. But do you think that if I hired you that way, your friends in Washington would miss it?"

The boy shook his head slowly.

"Do you think that if you quit their service to become a sweeper, they wouldn't understand your reason?"

The boy nodded.

"Would they let *you* go?"

The boy shook his head. After a moment, he said in a tone of forlorn astonishment, "I hadn't thought of that at all, Mr. Rearden. I forgot them. I kept thinking of whether you'd want me or not and that the only thing that counted was your decision."

"I know."

"And ... it is the only thing that counts, in fact."

"Yes, Non-Absolute, *in fact*."

The boy's mouth jerked suddenly into the brief, mirthless twist of a smile. "I guess I'm tied worse than any sucker ..."

"Yes. There's nothing you can do now, except apply to the Unification Board for permission to change your job. I'll support your application, if you want to try—only I don't think they'll grant it. I don't think they'll let you work for me."

"No. They won't."

"If you maneuver enough and lie enough, they might permit you to transfer to a private job—with some other steel company."

"No! I don't want to go anywhere else! I don't want to leave this place!" He stood looking off at the invisible vapor of rain over the flame of the furnaces. After a while, he said quietly, "I'd better stay put, I guess. I'd better go on being a deputy looter. Besides, if I left, God only knows what sort of bastard they'd saddle you with in my place!" He turned. "They're up to something, Mr. Rearden. I don't know what it is, but they're getting ready to spring something on you."

"What?"

"I don't know. But they've been watching every opening here, in the last few weeks, every desertion, and slipping their own gang in. A queer sort of gang, too—real goons, some of them, that I'd swear never stepped inside a steel plant before. I've had orders to get as many of 'our boys' in as possible. They wouldn't tell me why. I don't know what it is they're planning. I've tried to pump them, but they're acting pretty cagey about it. I don't think they trust me any more. I'm losing the right touch, I guess. All I know is they're getting set to pull something .here."

"Thanks for warning me."

“I’ll try to get the dope on it. I’ll try my damndest to get it in time.” He turned brusquely and started off, but stopped. “Mr. Rearden, if it were up to you, you would have hired me?”

“I would have, gladly and at once.”

“Thank you, Mr. Rearden,” he said, his voice solemn and low, then walked away.

Rearden stood looking after him, seeing, with a tearing smile of pity, what it was that the ex-relativist, the ex-pragmatist, the ex-amoralist was carrying away with him for consolation.

* * *

On the afternoon of September 11, a copper wire broke in Minnesota, stopping the belts of a grain elevator at a small country station of Taggart Transcontinental.

A flood of wheat was moving down the highways, the roads, the abandoned trails of the countryside, emptying thousands of acres of farmland upon the fragile dams of the railroad’s stations. It was moving day and night, the first trickles growing into streams, then rivers, then torrents—moving on palsied trucks with coughing, tubercular motors—on wagons pulled by the rusty skeletons of starving horses—on carts pulled by oxen—on the nerves and last energy of men who had lived through two years of disaster for the triumphant reward of this autumn’s giant harvest, men who had patched their trucks and carts with wire, blankets, ropes and sleepless nights, to make them hold together for this one more journey, to carry the grain and collapse at destination, but to give their owners a chance at survival.

Every year, at this season, another movement had gone clicking across the country, drawing freight cars from all corners of the continent to the Minnesota Division of Taggart Transcontinental, the beat of train wheels preceding the creak of the wagons, like an advance echo rigorously planned, ordered and timed to meet the flood. The Minnesota Division drowsed through the year, to come to violent life for the weeks of the harvest; fourteen thousand freight cars had jammed its yards each year; fifteen thousand were expected this time. The first of the wheat trains had started to channel the flood into the hungry flour mills, then bakeries, then stomachs of the nation—but every train, car and storage elevator counted, and there was no minute or inch of space to spare.

Eddie Willers watched Dagny’s face as she went through the cards of her

emergency file; he could tell the content of the cards by her expression. "The Terminal," she said quietly, closing the file. "Phone the Terminal downstairs and have them ship half their stock of wire to Minnesota." Eddie said nothing and obeyed.

He said nothing, the morning when he put on her desk a telegram from the Taggart office in Washington, informing them of the directive which, due to the critical shortage of copper, ordered government agents to seize all copper mines and operate them as a public utility. "Well," she said, dropping the telegram into the wastebasket, "that's the end of Montana."

She said nothing when James Taggart announced to her that he was issuing an order to discontinue all dining cars on Taggart trains. "We can't afford it any longer," he explained, "we've always lost money on those goddamn diners, and when there's no food to get, when restaurants are closing because they can't grab hold of a pound of horse meat anywhere, how can railroads be expected to do it? Why in hell should we have to feed the passengers, anyway? They're lucky if we give them transportation, they'd travel in cattle cars if necessary, let 'em pack their own box lunches, what do we care?—they've got no other trains to take!"

The telephone on her desk had become, not a voice of business, but an alarm siren for the desperate appeals of disaster. "Miss Taggart, we have no copper wire!" "Nails, Miss Taggart, plain nails, could you tell somebody to send us a keg of nails?" "Can you find any paint, Miss Taggart, any sort of waterproof paint anywhere?"

But thirty million dollars of subsidy money from Washington had been plowed into Project Soybean—an enormous acreage in Louisiana, where a harvest of soybeans was ripening, as advocated and organized by Emma Chalmers, for the purpose of reconditioning the dietary habits of the nation. Emma Chalmers, better known as Kip's Ma, was an old sociologist who had hung about Washington for years, as other women of her age and type hang about barrooms. For some reason which nobody could define, the death of her son in the tunnel catastrophe had given her in Washington an aura of martyrdom, heightened by her recent conversion to Buddhism. "The soybean is a much more sturdy, nutritious and economical plant than all the extravagant foods which our wasteful, self-indulgent diet has conditioned us to expect," Kip's Ma had said over the radio; her voice always sounded as if it were falling in drops, not of water, but of mayonnaise. "Soybeans make an excellent substitute for bread, meat, cereals and coffee—and if all of us were compelled to adopt soybeans as our staple diet, it would solve the national food crisis and make it possible to feed more people. The greatest food for the greatest number—that's my slogan. At a time of desperate public need, it's our duty to sacrifice our luxurious tastes

and eat our way back to prosperity by adapting ourselves to the simple, wholesome foodstuff on which the peoples of the Orient have so nobly subsisted for centuries. There's a great deal that we could learn from the peoples of the Orient."

"Copper tubing, Miss Taggart, could you get some copper tubing for us somewhere?" the voices were pleading over her telephone. "Rail spikes, Miss Taggart!" "Screwdrivers, Miss Taggart!" "Light bulbs, Miss Taggart, there's no electric light bulbs to be had anywhere within two hundred miles of us!"

But five million dollars was being spent by the office of Morale Conditioning on the People's Opera Company, which traveled through the country, giving free performances to people who, on one meal a day, could not afford the energy to walk to the opera house. Seven million dollars had been granted to a psychologist in charge of a project to solve the world crisis by research into the nature of brother-love. Ten million dollars had been granted to the manufacturer of a new electronic cigarette lighter—but there were no cigarettes in the shops of the country. There were flashlights on the market, but no batteries; there were radios, but no tubes; there were cameras, but no film. The production of airplanes had been declared "temporarily suspended." Air travel for private purposes had been forbidden, and reserved exclusively for missions of "public need." An industrialist traveling to save his factory was not considered as publicly needed and could not get aboard a plane; an official traveling to collect taxes was and could.

"People are stealing nuts and bolts out of rail plates, Miss Taggart, stealing them at night, and our stock is running out, the division storehouse is bare, what are we to do, Miss Taggart?"

But a super-color-four-foot-screen television set was being erected for tourists in a People's Park in Washington—and a super-cyclotron for the study of cosmic rays was being erected at the State Science Institute, to be completed in ten years.

"The trouble with our modern world," Dr. Robert Stadler said over the radio, at the ceremonies launching the construction of the cyclotron, "is that too many people think too much. It is the cause of all our current fears and doubts. An enlightened citizenry should abandon the superstitious worship of logic and the outmoded reliance on reason. Just as laymen leave medicine to doctors and electronics to engineers, so people who are not qualified to think should leave all thinking to the experts and have faith in the experts' higher authority. Only experts are able to understand the discoveries of modern science, which have proved that thought is an illusion and that the mind is a myth."

"This age of misery is God's punishment to man for the sin of relying on his

mind!” snarled the triumphant voices of mystics of every sect and sort, on street corners, in rain-soaked tents, in crumbling temples. “This world ordeal is the result of man’s attempt to live by reason! This is where thinking, logic and science have brought you! And there’s to be no salvation until men realize that their mortal mind is impotent to solve their problems and go back to faith, faith in God, faith in a higher authority!”

And confronting her daily there was the final product of it all, the heir and collector—Cuffy Meigs, the man impervious to thought. Cuffy Meigs strode through the offices of Taggart Transcontinental, wearing a semi-military tunic and slapping a shiny leather briefcase against his shiny leather leggings. He carried an automatic pistol in one pocket and a rabbit’s foot in the other.

Cuffy Meigs tried to avoid her; his manner was part scorn, as if he considered her an impractical idealist, part superstitious awe, as if she possessed some incomprehensible power with which he preferred not to tangle. He acted as if her presence did not belong to his view of a railroad, yet as if hers were the one presence he dared not challenge. There was a touch of impatient resentment in his manner toward Jim, as if it were Jim’s duty to deal with her and to protect him; just as he expected Jim to keep the railroad in running order and leave him free for activities of more practical a nature, so he expected Jim to keep her in line, as part of the equipment.

Beyond the window of her office, like a patch of adhesive plaster stuck over a wound on the sky, the page of the calendar hung blank in the distance. The calendar had never been repaired since the night of Francisco’s farewell. The officials who had rushed to the tower, that night, had knocked the calendar’s motor to a stop, while tearing the film out of the projector. They had found the small square of Francisco’s message, pasted into the strip of numbered days, but who had pasted it there, who had entered the locked room and when and how, was never discovered by the three commissions still investigating the case. Pending the outcome of their efforts, the page hung blank and still above the city.

It was blank on the afternoon of September 14, when the telephone rang in her office. “A man from Minnesota,” said the voice of her secretary.

She had told her secretary that she would accept all calls of this kind. They were the appeals for help and her only source of information. At a time when the voices of railroad officials uttered nothing but sounds designed to avoid communication, the voices of nameless men were her last link to the system, the last sparks of reason and tortured honesty flashing briefly through the miles of Taggart track.

“Miss Taggart, it is not my place to call you, but nobody else will.” said the

voice that came on the wire, this time; the voice sounded young and too calm. "In another day or two, a disaster's going to happen here the like of which they've never seen, and they won't be able to hide it any longer, only it will be too late by then, and maybe it's too late already."

"What is it? Who are you?"

"One of your employees of the Minnesota Division, Miss Taggart. In another day or two, the trains will stop running out of here—and you know what that means, at the height of the harvest. At the height of the biggest harvest we've ever had. They'll stop, because we have no cars. The harvest freight cars have not been sent to us this year."

"What did you say?" She felt as if minutes went by between the words of the unnatural voice that did not sound like her own.

"The cars have not been sent. Fifteen thousand should have been here by now. As far as I could learn, about eight thousand cars is all we got. I've been calling Division Headquarters for a week. They've been telling me not to worry. Last time, they told me to mind my own damn business. Every shed, silo, elevator, warehouse, garage and dance hall along the track is filled with wheat. At the Sherman elevators, there's a line of farmers' trucks and wagons two miles long, waiting on the road. At Lakewood Station, the square is packed solid and has been for three nights. They keep telling us it's only temporary, the cars are coming and we'll catch up. We won't. There aren't any cars coming. I've called everyone I could. I know, by the way they answer. They know, and not one of them wants to admit it. They're scared, scared to move or speak or ask or answer. All they're thinking of is who will be blamed when that harvest rots here around the stations—and not of who's going to move it. Maybe nobody can, now. Maybe there's nothing you can do about it, either. But I thought you're the only person left who'd want to know and that somebody had to tell you."

"I ..." She made an effort to breathe. "I see ... Who are you?"

"The name wouldn't matter. When I hang up, I will have become a deserter. I don't want to stay here to see it when it happens. I don't want any part of it any more. Good luck to you, Miss Taggart."

She heard the click. "Thank you," she said over a dead wire.

The next time she noticed the office around her and permitted herself to feel, it was noon of the following day. She stood in the middle of the office, running stiff, spread fingers through a strand of hair, brushing it back off her face—and for an instant, she wondered where she was and what was the unbelievable thing that had happened in the last twenty hours. What she felt was horror, and she knew that she had felt it from the first words of the man on the wire, only there had been no time to know it.

There was not much that remained in her mind of the last twenty hours, only disconnected bits, held together by the single constant that had made them possible—by the soft, loose faces of men who fought to hide from themselves that they knew the answers to the questions she asked.

From the moment when she was told that the manager of the Car Service Department had been out of town for a week and had left no address where one could reach him—she knew that the report of the man from Minnesota was true. Then came the faces of the assistants in the Car Service Department, who would neither confirm the report nor deny it, but kept showing her papers, orders, forms, file cards that bore words in the English language, but no connection to intelligible facts. “Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?” “Form 357W is filled out in every particular, as required by the office of the Co-ordinator in conformance with the instructions of the comptroller and by Directive 11-493.” “Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?” “The entries for the months of August and September have been processed by—” “Were the freight cars sent to Minnesota?” “My files indicate the locations of freight cars by state, date, classification and—” “Do you know whether the cars were sent to Minnesota?” “As to the interstate motion of freight cars, I would have to refer you to the files of Mr. Benson and of—”

There was nothing to learn from the files. There were careful entries, each conveying four possible meanings, with references which led to references which led to a final reference which was missing from the files. It did not take her long to discover that the cars had not been sent to Minnesota and that the order had come from Cuffy Meigs—but who had carried it out, who had tangled the trail, what steps had been taken by what compliant men to preserve the appearance of a safely normal operation, without a single cry of protest to arouse some braver man’s attention, who had falsified the reports, and where the cars had gone—seemed, at first, impossible to learn.

Through the hours of that night—while a small, desperate crew under the command of Eddie Willers kept calling every division point, every yard, depot, station, spur and siding of Taggart Transcontinental for every freight car in sight or reach, ordering them to unload, drop, dump, scuttle anything and proceed to Minnesota at once, while they kept calling the yards, stations and presidents of every railroad still half in existence anywhere across the map, begging for cars for Minnesota—she went through the task of tracing from face to coward’s face the destination of the freight cars that had vanished.

She went from railroad executives to wealthy shippers to Washington officials and back to the railroad—by cab, by phone, by wire—pursuing a trail of half-uttered hints. The trail approached its end when she heard the pinch-lipped voice

of a public relations woman in a Washington office, saying resentfully over the telephone wire, "Well, after all, it is a matter of opinion whether wheat is essential to a nation's welfare—there are those of more progressive views who feel that the soybean is, perhaps, of far greater value"—and then, by noon, she stood in the middle of her office, knowing that the freight cars intended for the wheat of Minnesota had been sent, instead, to carry the soybeans from the Louisiana swamps of Kip's Ma's project.

The first story of the Minnesota disaster appeared in the newspapers three days later. It reported that the farmers who had waited in the streets of Lakewood for six days, with no place to store their wheat and no trains to carry it, had demolished the local courthouse, the mayor's home and the railroad station. Then the stories vanished abruptly and the newspapers kept silent, then began to print admonitions urging people not to believe unpatriotic rumors.

While the flour mills and grain markets of the country were screaming over the phones and the telegraph wires, sending pleas to New York and delegations to Washington, while strings of freight cars from random corners of the continent were crawling like rusty caterpillars across the map in the direction of Minnesota—the wheat and hope of the country were waiting to perish along an empty track, under the unchanging green lights of signals that called for motion to trains that were not there.

At the communication desks of Taggart Transcontinental, a small crew kept calling for freight cars, repeating, like the crew of a sinking ship, an S.O.S. that remained unheard. There were freight cars held loaded for months in the yards of the companies owned by the friends of pull-peddlers, who ignored the frantic demands to unload the cars and release them. "You can tell that railroad to—" followed by un-transmissible words, was the message of the Smather Brothers of Arizona in answer to the S.O.S. of New York.

In Minnesota, they were seizing cars from every siding, from the Mesabi Range, from the ore mines of Paul Larkin where the cars had stood waiting for a dribble of iron. They were pouring wheat into ore cars, into coal cars, into boarded stock cars that went spilling thin gold trickles along the track as they clattered off. They were pouring wheat into passenger coaches, over seats, racks and fixtures, to send it off, to get it moving, even if it went moving into track-side ditches in the sudden crash of breaking springs, in the explosions set off by burning journal boxes.

They fought for movement, for movement with no thought of destination, for movement as such, like a paralytic under a stroke, struggling in wild, stiff, incredulous jerks against the realization that movement was suddenly impossible. There were no other railroads: James Taggart had killed them; there

were no boats on the Lakes: Paul Larkin had destroyed them. There was only the single line of rail and a net of neglected highways.

The trucks and wagons of waiting farmers started trickling blindly down the roads, with no maps, no gas, no feed for horses—moving south, south toward the vision of flour mills awaiting them somewhere, with no knowledge of the distances ahead, but with the knowledge of death behind them—moving, to collapse on the roads, in the gullies, in the breaks of rotted bridges. One farmer was found, half a mile south of the wreck of his truck, lying dead in a ditch, face down, still clutching a sack of wheat on his shoulders. Then rain clouds burst over the prairies of Minnesota; the rain went eating the wheat into rot at the waiting railroad stations; it went hammering the piles spilled along the roads, washing gold kernels into the soil.

The men in Washington were last to be reached by the panic. They watched, not the news from Minnesota, but the precarious balance of their friendships and commitments; they weighed, not the fate of the harvest, but the unknowable result of unpredictable emotions in unthinking men of unlimited power. They waited, they evaded all pleas, they declared, “Oh, ridiculous, there’s nothing to worry about! Those Taggart people have always moved that wheat on schedule, they’ll find some way to move it!”

Then, when the State Chief Executive of Minnesota sent a request to Washington for the assistance of the Army against the riots he was unable to control—three directives burst forth within two hours, stopping all trains in the country, commandeering all cars to speed to Minnesota. An order signed by Wesley Mouch demanded the immediate release of the freight cars held in the service of Kip’s Ma. But by that time, it was too late. Ma’s freight cars were in California, where the soybeans had been sent to a progressive concern made up of sociologists preaching the cult of Oriental austerity, and of businessmen formerly in the numbers racket.

In Minnesota, farmers were setting fire to their own farms, they were demolishing grain elevators and the homes of county officials, they were fighting along the track of the railroad, some to tear it up, some to defend it with their lives—and, with no goal to reach save violence, they were dying in the streets of gutted towns and in the silent gullies of a roadless night.

Then there was only the acrid stench of grain rotting in half-smouldering piles—a few columns of smoke rising from the plains, standing still in the air over blackened ruins—and, in an office in Pennsylvania, Hank Rearden sitting at his desk, looking at a list of men who had gone bankrupt: they were the manufacturers of farm equipment, who could not be paid and would not be able to pay him.

The harvest of soybeans did not reach the markets of the country: it had been reaped prematurely, it was moldy and unfit for consumption.



On the night of October 15, a copper wire broke in New York City, in an underground control tower of the Taggart Terminal, extinguishing the lights of the signals.

It was only the breach of one wire, but it produced a short circuit in the interlocking traffic system, and the signals of motion or danger disappeared from the panels of the control towers and from among the strands of rail. The red and green lenses remained red and green, not with the living radiance of sight, but with the dead stare of glass eyes. On the edge of the city, a cluster of trains gathered at the entrance to the Terminal tunnels and grew through the minutes of stillness, like blood dammed by a clot inside a vein, unable to rush into the chambers of the heart.

Dagny, that night, was sitting at a table in a private dining room of the Wayne-Falkland. The wax of candles was dripping down on the white camellias and laurel leaves at the base of the silver candlesticks, arithmetical calculations were penciled on the damask linen tablecloth, and a cigar butt was swimming in a finger bowl. The six men in formal dinner jackets, facing her about the table, were Wesley Mouch, Eugene Lawson, Dr. Floyd Ferris, Clem Weatherby, James Taggart and Cuffy Meigs.

“Why?” she had asked, when Jim had told her that she had to attend that dinner. “Well ... because our Board of Directors is to meet next week.” “And?” “You’re interested in what’s going to be decided about our Minnesota Line, aren’t you?” “Is that going to be decided at the Board meeting?” “Well, not exactly.” “Is it going to be decided at this dinner?” “Not exactly, but ... oh, why do you always have to be so definite? Nothing’s ever definite. Besides, they insisted that they wanted you to come.” “Why?” “Isn’t that sufficient?”

She did not ask why those men chose to make all their crucial decisions at parties of this kind; she knew that they did. She knew that behind the clattering, lumbering pretense of their council sessions, committee meetings and mass debates, the decisions were made in advance, in furtive informality, at luncheons, dinners and bars, the graver the issue, the more casual the method of settling it. It was the first time that they had asked her, the outsider, the enemy, to one of those secret sessions; it was, she thought, an acknowledgment of the

fact that they needed her and, perhaps, the first step of their surrender; it was a chance she could not leave untaken.

But as she sat in the candlelight of the dining room, she felt certain that she had no chance; she felt restlessly unable to accept that certainty, since she could not grasp its reason, yet lethargically reluctant to pursue any inquiry.

“As, I think, you will concede, Miss Taggart, there now seems to be no economic justification for the continued existence of a railroad line in Minnesota, which ...” “And even Miss Taggart will, I’m sure, agree that certain temporary retrenchments seem to be indicated, until ...” “Nobody, not even Miss Taggart, will deny that there are times when it is necessary to sacrifice the parts for the sake of the whole ...” As she listened to the mentions of her name tossed into the conversation at half-hour intervals, tossed perfunctorily, with the speaker’s eyes never glancing in her direction, she wondered what motive had made them want her to be present. It was not an attempt to delude her into believing that they were consulting her, but worse: an attempt to delude themselves into believing that she had agreed. They asked her questions at times and interrupted her before she had completed the first sentence of the answer. They seemed to want her approval, without having to know whether she approved or not.

Some crudely childish form of self-deception had made them choose to give to this occasion the decorous setting of a formal dinner. They acted as if they hoped to gain, from the objects of gracious luxury, the power and the honor of which those objects had once been the product and symbol—they acted, she thought, like those savages who devour the corpse of an adversary in the hope of acquiring his strength and his virtue.

She regretted that she was dressed as she was. “It’s formal,” Jim had told her, “but don’t overdo it ... what I mean is, don’t look too rich ... business people should avoid any appearance of arrogance these days ... not that you should look shabby, but if you could just seem to suggest ... well, humility ... it would please them, you know, it would make them feel big.” “Really?” she had said, turning away.

She wore a black dress that looked as if it were no more than a piece of cloth crossed over her breasts and falling to her feet in the soft folds of a Grecian tunic; it was made of satin, a satin so light and thin that it could have served as the stuff of a nightgown. The luster of the cloth, streaming and shifting with her movements, made it look as if the light of the room she entered were her personal property, sensitively obedient to the motions of her body, wrapping her in a sheet of radiance more luxurious than the texture of brocade, underscoring the pliant fragility of her figure, giving her an air of so natural an elegance that it

could afford to be scornfully casual. She wore a single piece of jewelry, a diamond clip at the edge of the black neckline, that kept flashing with the imperceptible motion of her breath, like a transformer converting a flicker into fire, making one conscious, not of the gems, but of the living beat behind them; it flashed like a military decoration, like wealth worn as a badge of honor. She wore no other ornament, only the sweep of a black velvet cape, more arrogantly, ostentatiously patrician than any spread of sables.

She regretted it now, as she looked at the men before her; she felt the embarrassing guilt of pointlessness, as if she had tried to defy the figures in a waxworks. She saw a mindless resentment in their eyes and a sneaking trace of the lifeless, sexless, smutty leer with which men look at a poster advertising burlesque.

"It's a great responsibility," said Eugene Lawson, "to hold the decision of life or death over thousands of people and to sacrifice them when necessary, but we must have the courage to do it." His soft lips seemed to twist into a smile.

"The only factors to consider are land acreage and population figures," said Dr. Ferris in a statistical voice, blowing smoke rings at the ceiling. "Since it is no longer possible to maintain both the Minnesota Line and the transcontinental traffic of this railroad, the choice is between Minnesota and those states west of the Rockies which were cut off by the failure of the Taggart Tunnel, as well as the neighboring states of Montana, Idaho, Oregon, which means, practically speaking, the whole of the Northwest. When you compute the acreage and the number of heads in both areas, it's obvious that we should scuttle Minnesota rather than give up our lines of communication over a third of a continent."

"I won't give up the continent," said Wesley Mouch, staring down at his dish of ice cream, his voice hurt and stubborn.

She was thinking of the Mesabi Range, the last of the major sources of iron ore, she was thinking of the Minnesota farmers, such as were left of them, the best producers of wheat in the country—she was thinking that the end of Minnesota would end Wisconsin, then Michigan, then Illinois—she was seeing the red breath of the factories dying out over the industrial East—as against the empty miles of western sands, of scraggly pastures and abandoned ranches.

"The figures indicate," said Mr. Weatherby primly, "that the continued maintenance of both areas seems to be impossible. The railway track and equipment of one has to be dismantled to provide the material for the maintenance of the other."

She noticed that Clem Weatherby, their technical expert on railroads, was the man of least influence among them, and Cuffy Meigs—of most. Cuffy Meigs sat sprawled in his chair, with a look of patronizing tolerance for their game of

wasting time on discussions. He spoke little, but when he did, it was to snap decisively, with a contemptuous grin, "Pipe down, Jimmy!" or, "Nuts, Wes, you're talking through your hat!" She noticed that neither Jim nor Mouch resented it. They seemed to welcome the authority of his assurance; they were accepting him as their master.

"We have to be practical," Dr. Ferris kept saying. "We have to be scientific."

"I need the economy of the country as a whole," Wesley Mouch kept repeating. "I need the production of a nation."

"Is it economics that you're talking about? Is it production?" she said, whenever her cold, measured voice was able to seize a brief stretch of their time. "If it is, then give us leeway to save the Eastern states. That's all that's left of the country—and of the world. If you let us save that, we'll have a chance to rebuild the rest. If not, it's the end. Let the Atlantic Southern take care of such transcontinental traffic as still exists. Let the local railroads take care of the Northwest. But let Taggart Transcontinental drop everything else—yes, everything—and devote all our resources, equipment and rail to the traffic of the Eastern states. Let us shrink back to the start of this country, but let us hold that start. We'll run no trains west of the Missouri. We'll become a local railroad—the local of the industrial East. Let us save our industries. There's nothing left to save in the West. You can run agriculture for centuries by manual labor and oxcarts. But destroy the last of this country's industrial plant—and centuries of effort won't be able to rebuild it or to gather the economic strength to make a start. How do you expect our industries—or railroads—to survive without steel? How do you expect any steel to be produced if you cut off the supply of iron ore? Save Minnesota, whatever's left of it. The country? You have no country to save, if its industries perish. You can sacrifice a leg or an arm. You can't save a body by sacrificing its heart and brain. Save our industries. Save Minnesota. Save the Eastern Seaboard."

It was no use. She said it as many times, with as many details, statistics, figures, proofs, as she could force out of her weary mind into their evasive hearing. It was no use. They neither refuted nor agreed; they merely looked as if her arguments were beside the point. There was a sound of hidden emphasis in their answers, as if they were giving her an explanation, but in a code to which she had no key.

"There's trouble in California," said Wesley Mouch sullenly. "Their state legislature's been acting pretty huffy. There's talk of seceding from the Union."

"Oregon is overrun by gangs of deserters," said Clem Weatherby cautiously. "They murdered two tax collectors within the last three months."

"The importance of industry to a civilization has been grossly

overemphasized,” said Dr. Ferris dreamily. “What is now known as the People’s State of India has existed for centuries without any industrial development whatever.”

“People could do with fewer material gadgets and a sterner discipline of privations,” said Eugene Lawson eagerly. “It would be good for them.”

“Oh hell, are you going to let that dame talk you into letting the richest country on earth slip through your fingers?” said Cuffy Meigs, leaping to his feet. “It’s a fine time to give up a whole continent—and in exchange for what? For a dinky little state that’s milked dry, anyway! I say ditch Minnesota, but hold onto your transcontinental dragnet. With trouble and riots everywhere, you won’t be able to keep people in line unless you have transportation—troop transportation—unless you hold your soldiers within a few days’ journey of any point on the continent. This is no time to retrench. Don’t get yellow, listening to all that talk. You’ve got the country in your pocket. Just keep it there.”

“In the long run—” Mouch started uncertainly.

“In the long run, we’ll all be dead,” snapped Cuffy Meigs. He was pacing restlessly. “Retrenching, hell! There’s plenty of pickings left in California and Oregon and all those places. What I’ve been thinking is, we ought to think of expanding—the way things are, there’s nobody to stop us, it’s there for the taking—Mexico, and Canada maybe—it ought to be a cinch.”

Then she saw the answer; she saw the secret premise behind their words. With all of their noisy devotion to the age of science, their hysterically technological jargon, their cyclotrons, their sound rays, these men were moved forward, not by the image of an industrial skyline, but by the vision of that form of existence which the industrialists had swept away—the vision of a fat, unhygienic rajah of India, with vacant eyes staring in indolent stupor out of stagnant layers of flesh, with nothing to do but run precious gems through his fingers and, once in a while, stick a knife into the body of a starved, toil-dazed, germ-eaten creature, as a claim to a few grains of the creature’s rice, then claim it from hundreds of millions of such creatures and thus let the rice grains gather into gems.

She had thought that industrial production was a value not to be questioned by anyone; she had thought that these men’s urge to expropriate the factories of others was their acknowledgment of the factories’ value. She, born of the industrial revolution, had not held as conceivable, had forgotten along with the tales of astrology and alchemy, what these men knew in their secret, furtive souls, knew not by means of thought, but by means of that nameless muck which they called their instincts and emotions: that so long as men struggle to stay alive, they’ll never produce so little but that the man with the club won’t be able to seize it and leave them still less, provided millions of them are willing to

submit—that the harder their work and the less their gain, the more submissive the fiber of their spirit—that men who live by pulling levers at an electric switchboard, are not easily ruled, but men who live by digging the soil with their naked fingers, are—that the feudal baron did not need electronic factories in order to drink his brains away out of jeweled goblets, and neither did the rajahs of the People’s State of India.

She saw what they wanted and to what goal their “instincts,” which they called unaccountable, were leading them. She saw that Eugene Lawson, the humanitarian, took pleasure at the prospect of human starvation—and Dr. Ferris, the scientist, was dreaming of the day when men would return to the hand-plow.

Incredulity and indifference were her only reaction: incredulity, because she could not conceive of what would bring human beings to such a state—indifference, because she could not regard those who reached it, as human any longer. They went on talking, but she was unable to speak or to listen. She caught herself feeling that her only desire was now to get home and fall asleep.

“Miss Taggart,” said a politely rational, faintly anxious voice—and jerking her head up, she saw the courteous figure of a waiter, “the assistant manager of the Taggart Terminal is on the telephone, requesting permission to speak to you at once. He says it’s an emergency.”

It was a relief to leap to her feet and get out of that room, even if in answer to the call of some new disaster. It was a relief to hear the assistant manager’s voice, even though it was saying, “The interlocker system is out, Miss Taggart. The signals are dead. There are eight incoming trains held up and six outgoing. We can’t move them in or out of the tunnels, we can’t find the chief engineer, we can’t locate the breach of the circuit, we have no copper wire for repairs, we don’t know what to do, we—” “I’ll be right down,” she said, dropping the receiver.

Hurrying to the elevator, then half-running through the stately lobby of the Wayne-Falkland, she felt herself returning to life at the summons of the possibility of action.

Taxicabs were rare, these days, and none came in answer to the doorman’s whistle. She started rapidly down the street, forgetting what she wore, wondering why the touch of the wind seemed too cold and too intimately close.

Her mind on the Terminal ahead, she was startled by the loveliness of a sudden sight: she saw the slender figure of a woman hurrying toward her, the ray of a lamppost sweeping over lustrous hair, naked arms, the swirl of a black cape and the flame of a diamond on her breast, with the long, empty corridor of a city street behind her and skyscrapers drawn by lonely dots of light. The knowledge that she was seeing her own reflection in the side mirror of a florist’s window,

came an instant too late: she had felt the enchantment of the full context to which that image and city belonged. Then she felt a stab of desolate loneliness, much wider a loneliness than the span of an empty street—and a stab of anger at herself, at the preposterous contrast between her appearance and the context of this night and age.

She saw a taxi turn a corner, she waved to it and leaped in, slamming the door against a feeling which she hoped to leave behind her, on the empty pavement by a florist's window. But she knew—in self-mockery, in bitterness, in longing—that this feeling was the sense of expectation she had felt at her first ball and at those rare times when she had wanted the outward beauty of existence to match its inner splendor. What a time to think of it! she told herself in mockery—not now! she cried to herself in anger—but a desolate voice kept asking her quietly to the rattle of the taxi's wheels: You who believed you must live for your happiness, what do you now have left of it?—what are you gaining from your struggle?—yes! say it honestly: what's in it for you?—or are you becoming one of those abject altruists who has no answer to that question any longer? ... Not now!—she ordered, as the glowing entrance to the Taggart Terminal flared up in the rectangle of the taxi's windshield.

The men in the Terminal manager's office were like extinguished signals, as if here, too, a circuit were broken and there were no living current to make them move. They looked at her with a kind of inanimate passivity, as if it made no difference whether she let them stay still or threw a switch to set them in motion.

The Terminal manager was absent. The chief engineer could not be found; he had been seen at the Terminal two hours ago, not since. The assistant manager had exhausted his power of initiative by volunteering to call her. The others volunteered nothing. The signal engineer was a college-boyish man in his thirties, who kept saying aggressively, "But this has never happened before, Miss Taggart! The interlocker has never failed. It's not supposed to fail. We know our jobs, we can take care of it as well as anybody can—but not if it breaks down when it's not supposed to!" She could not tell whether the dispatcher, an elderly man with years of railroad work behind him, still retained his intelligence but chose to hide it, or whether months of suppressing it had choked it for good, granting him the safety of stagnation.

"We don't know what to do, Miss Taggart." "We don't know whom to call for what sort of permission." "There are no rules to cover an emergency of this kind." "There aren't even any rules about who's to lay down the rules for it!"

She listened, she reached for the telephone without a word of explanation, she ordered the operator to get her the operating vice-president of the Atlantic Southern in Chicago, to get him at his home and out of bed, if necessary.

“George? Dagny Taggart,” she said, when the voice of her competitor came on the wire. “Will you lend me the signal engineer of your Chicago terminal, Charles Murray, for twenty-four hours? ... Yes.... Right.... Put him aboard a plane and get him here as fast as you can. Tell him we’ll pay three thousand dollars.... Yes, for the one day.... Yes, as bad as that.... Yes, I’ll pay him in cash, out of my own pocket, if necessary. I’ll pay whatever it takes to bribe his way aboard a plane, but get him on the first plane out of Chicago.... No, George, not one—not a single mind left on Taggart Transcontinental.... Yes, I’ll get all the papers, exemptions, exceptions and emergency permissions.... Thanks, George. So long.”

She hung up and spoke rapidly to the men before her, not to hear the stillness of the room and of the Terminal, where no sound of wheels was beating any longer, not to hear the bitter words which the stillness seemed to repeat: Not a single mind left on Taggart Transcontinental....

“Get a wrecking train and crew ready at once,” she said. “Send them out on the Hudson Line, with orders to tear down every foot of copper wire, any copper wire, lights, signals, telephone, everything that’s company property. Have it here by morning.” “But, Miss Taggart! Our service on the Hudson Line is only temporarily suspended and the Unification Board has refused us permission to dismantle the line!” “I’ll be responsible.” “But how are we going to get the wrecking train out of here, when there aren’t any signals?” “There will be signals in half an hour.” “How?” “Come on,” she said, rising to her feet.

They followed her as she hurried down the passenger platforms, past the huddling, shifting groups of travelers by the motionless trains. She hurried down a narrow catwalk, through a maze of rail, past blinded signals and frozen switches, with nothing but the beat of her satin sandals to fill the great vaults of the underground tunnels of Taggart Transcontinental, with the hollow creaking of planks under the slower steps of men trailing her like a reluctant echo—she hurried to the lighted glass cube of Tower A, that hung in the darkness like a crown without a body, the crown of a deposed ruler above a realm of empty tracks.

The tower director was too expert a man at too exacting a job to be able wholly to conceal the dangerous burden of intelligence. He understood what she wanted him to do from her first few words and answered only with an abrupt “Yes, ma’am,” but he was bent over his charts by the time the others came following her up the iron stairway, he was grimly at work on the most humiliating job of calculation he had ever had to perform in his long career. She knew how fully he understood it, from a single glance he threw at her, a glance of indignation and endurance that matched some emotion he had caught in her

face. "We'll do it first and feel about it afterwards," she said, even though he had made no comment. "Yes, ma'.am," he answered woodenly.

His room, on the top of an underground tower, was like a glass verandah overlooking what had once been the swiftest, richest and most orderly stream in the world. He had been trained to chart the course of over ninety trains an hour and to watch them roll safely through a maze of tracks and switches in and out of the Terminal, under his glass walls and his fingertips. Now, for the first time, he was looking out at the empty darkness of a dried channel.

Through the open door of the relay room, she saw the tower men standing grimly idle—the men whose jobs had never permitted a moment's relaxation—standing by the long rows that looked like vertical copper pleats, like shelves of books and as much of a monument to human intelligence. The pull of one of the small levers, which protruded like bookmarks from the shelves, threw thousands of electric circuits into motion, made thousands of contacts and broke as many others, set dozens of switches to clear a chosen course and dozens of signals to light it, with no error left possible, no chance, no contradiction -an enormous complexity of thought condensed into one movement of a human hand to set and insure the course of a train, that hundreds of trains might safely rush by, that thousands of tons of metal and lives might pass in speeding streaks a breath away from one another, protected by nothing but a thought, the thought of the man who devised the levers. But they—she looked at the face of her signal engineer -they believed that that muscular contraction of a hand was the only thing required to move the traffic—and now the tower men stood idle—and on the great panels in front of the tower director, the red and green lights, which had flashed announcing the progress of trains at a distance of miles, were now so many glass beads—like the glass beads for which another breed of savages had once sold the Island of Manhattan.

"Call all of your unskilled laborers," she said to the assistant manager, "the section hands, trackwalkers, engine wipers, whoever's in the Terminal right now, and have them come here at once."

. "Here?"

"Here," she said, pointing at the tracks outside the tower. "Call all your switchmen, too. Phone your storehouse and have them bring here every lantern they can lay their hands on, any sort of lantern, conductors' lanterns, storm lanterns, anything."

"Lanterns, Miss Taggart?"

"Get going."

"Yes, ma'.am."

"What is it we're doing, Miss Taggart?" asked the dispatcher.

“We’re going to move trains and we’re going to move them manually.”

“*Manually?*” said the signal engineer.

“Yes, brother! Now why should *you* be shocked?” She could not resist it. “Man is only muscles, isn’t he? We’re going back—back to where there were no interlocking systems, no semaphores, no electricity -back to the time when train signals were not steel and wire, but men holding lanterns. Physical men, serving as lampposts. You’ve advocated it long enough—you got what you wanted. Oh, you thought that your tools would determine your ideas? But it happens to be the other way around—and now you’re going to see the kind of tools your ideas have determined!”

But even to go back took an act of intelligence—she thought, feeling the paradox of her own position, as she looked at the lethargy of the faces around her.

“How will we work the switches, Miss Taggart?”

“By hand.”

“And the signals?”

“By hand.”

“How?”

“By placing a man with a lantern at every signal post.”

“How? There’s not enough clearance.”

“We’ll use alternate tracks.”

“How will the men know which way to throw the switches?”

“By written orders.”

“Uh?”

“By written orders—just as in the old days.” She pointed to the tower director. “He’s working out a schedule of how to move the trains and which tracks to use. He’ll write out an order for every signal and switch, he’ll pick some men as runners and they’ll keep delivering the orders to every post—and it will take hours to do what used to take minutes, but we’ll get those waiting trains into the Terminal and out on the road.”

“We’re to work it that way all night?”

“And all day tomorrow—until the engineer who’s got the brains for it, shows you how to repair the interlocker.”

“There’s nothing in the union contracts about men standing with lanterns. There’s going to be trouble. The union will object.”

“Let them come to me.”

“The Unification Board will object.”

“I’ll be responsible.”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to be held for giving the orders—”

“I’ll give the orders.”

She stepped out on the landing of the iron stairway that hung on the side of the tower; she was fighting for self-control. It seemed to her for a moment as if she, too, were a precision instrument of high technology, left without electric current, trying to run a transcontinental railroad by means of her two hands. She looked out at the great, silent darkness of the Taggart underground—and she felt a stab of burning humiliation that she should now see it brought down to the level where human lampposts would stand in its tunnels as its last memorial statues.

She could barely distinguish the faces of the men when they gathered at the foot of the tower. They came streaming silently through the darkness and stood without moving in the bluish murk, with blue bulbs on the walls behind them and patches of light falling on their shoulders from the tower’s windows. She could see the greasy garments, the slack, muscular bodies, the limply hanging arms of men drained by the unrewarding exhaustion of a labor that required no thought. These were the dregs of the railroad, the younger men who could now seek no chance to rise and the older men who had never wanted to seek it. They stood in silence, not with the apprehensive curiosity of workmen, but with the heavy indifference of convicts.

“The orders which you are about to receive have come from me,” she said, standing above them on the iron stairs, speaking with resonant clarity. “The men who’ll issue them are acting under my instructions. The interlocking control system has broken down. It will now be replaced by human labor. Train service will be resumed at once.”

She noticed some faces in the crowd staring at her with a peculiar look: with a veiled resentment and the kind of insolent curiosity that made her suddenly conscious of being a woman. Then she remembered what she wore, and thought that it did look preposterous—and then, at the sudden stab of some violent impulse that felt like defiance and like loyalty to the full, real meaning of the moment, she threw her cape back and stood in the raw glare of light, under the sooted columns, like a figure at a formal reception, sternly erect, flaunting the luxury of naked arms, of glowing black satin, of a diamond flashing like a military cross.

“The tower director will assign switchmen to their posts. He will select men for the job of signaling trains by means of lanterns and for the task of transmitting his orders. Trains will—”

She was fighting to drown a bitter voice that seemed to be saying: That’s all they’re fit for, these men, if even that ... there’s not a single mind left anywhere on Taggart Transcontinental....

“Trains will continue to be moved in and out of the Terminal. You will remain

at your posts until—”

Then she stopped. It was his eyes and hair that she saw first—the ruthlessly perceptive eyes, the streaks of hair shaded from gold to copper that seemed to reflect the glow of sunlight in the murk of the underground—she saw John Galt among the chain gang of the mindless, John Galt in greasy overalls and rolled shirt sleeves, she saw his weightless way of standing, his face held lifted, his eyes looking at her as if he had seen this moment many moments ago.

“What’s the matter, Miss Taggart?”

It was the soft voice of the tower director, who stood by her side, with some sort of paper in his hand—and she thought it was strange to emerge from a span of unconsciousness which had been the span of the sharpest awareness she had ever experienced, only she did not know how long it had lasted or where she was or why. She had been aware of Galt’s face, she had been seeing, in the shape of his mouth, in the planes of his cheeks, the crackup of that implacable serenity which had always been his, but he still retained it in his look of acknowledging the breach, of admitting that this moment was too much even for him.

She knew that she went on speaking, because those around her looked as if they were listening, though she could not hear a sound, she went on speaking as if carrying out a hypnotic order given to herself some endless time ago, knowing only that the completion of that order was a form of defiance against him, neither knowing nor hearing her own words.

She felt as if she were standing in a radiant silence where sight was her only capacity and his face was its only object, and the sight of his face was like a speech in the form of a pressure at the base of her throat. It seemed so natural that he should be here, it seemed so unendurably simple—she felt as if the shock were not his presence, but the presence of others on the tracks of her railroad, where he belonged and they did not. She was seeing those moments aboard a train when, at its plunge into the tunnels, she had felt a sudden, solemn tension, as if this place were showing her in naked simplicity the essence of her railroad and of her life, the union of consciousness and matter, the frozen form of a mind’s ingenuity giving physical existence to its purpose; she had felt a sense of sudden hope, as if this place held the meaning of all of her values, and a sense of secret excitement, as if a nameless promise were awaiting her under the ground—it was right that she should now meet him here, *he* had been the meaning and the promise—she was not seeing his clothing any longer, nor to what level her railroad had reduced him—she was seeing only the vanishing torture of the months when he had been outside her reach—she was seeing in his face the confession of what those months had cost him—the only speech she heard was as if she were saying to him: This is the reward for all my days—and

as if he were answering: For all of mine.

She knew that she had finished speaking to the strangers when she saw that the tower director had stepped forward and was saying something to them, glancing at a list in his hand. Then, drawn by a sense of irresistible certainty, she found herself descending the stairs, slipping away from the crowd, not toward the platforms and the exit, but into the darkness of the abandoned tunnels. You will follow me, she thought -and felt as if the thought were not in words, but in the tension of her muscles, the tension of her will to accomplish a thing she knew to be outside her power, yet she knew with certainty that it would be accomplished and by her wish ... no, she thought, not by her wish, but by its total rightness. You will follow me—it was neither plea nor prayer nor demand, but the quiet statement of a fact, it contained the whole of her power of knowledge and the whole of the knowledge she had earned through the years. You will follow me, if we are what we are, you and I, if we live, if the world exists, if you know the meaning of this moment and can't let it slip by, as others let it slip, into the senselessness of the unwilled and unreached. You will follow me—she felt an exultant assurance, which was neither hope nor faith, but an act of worship for the logic of existence.

She was hurrying down the remnants of abandoned rails, down the long, dark corridors twisting through granite. She lost the sound of the director's voice behind her. Then she felt the beat of her arteries and heard, in answering rhythm, the beat of the city above her head, but she felt as if she heard the motion of her blood as a sound filling the silence, and the motion of the city as the beat inside her body—and, far behind her, she heard the sound of steps. She did not glance back. She went faster.

She went past the locked iron door where the remnant of his motor was still hidden, she did not stop, but a faint shudder was her answer to the sudden glimpse of the unity and logic in the events of the last two years. A string of blue lights went on into the darkness, over patches of glistening granite, over broken sandbags spilling drifts on the rails, over rusty piles of scrap metal. When she heard the steps coming closer, she stopped and turned to look back.

She saw a sweep of blue light flash briefly on the shining strands of Galt's hair, she caught the pale outline of his face and the dark hollows of his eyes. The face disappeared, but the sound of his steps served as the link to the next blue light that swept across the line of his eyes, the eyes that remained held level, directed ahead—and she felt certain that she had stayed in his sight from the moment he had seen her at the tower.

She heard the beat of the city above them—these tunnels, she had once thought, were the roots of the city and of all the motion reaching to the sky—but

they, she thought, John Galt and she, were the living power within these roots, they were the start and aim and meaning—he, too, she thought, heard the beat of the city as the beat of his body.

She threw her cape back, she stood defiantly straight, as he had seen her stand on the steps of the tower—as he had seen her for the first time, ten years ago, here, under the ground—she was hearing the words of his confession, not as words, but by means of that beating which made it so difficult to breathe: You looked like a symbol of luxury and you belonged in the place that was its source ... you seemed to bring the enjoyment of life back to its rightful owners ... you had a look of energy and of its reward, together ... and I was the first man who had ever stated in what manner these two were inseparable....

The next span of moments was like flashes of light in stretches of blinded unconsciousness—the moment when she saw his face, as he stopped beside her, when she saw the unastonished calm, the leashed intensity, the laughter of understanding in the dark green eyes—the moment when she knew what he saw in her face, by the tight, drawn harshness of his lips—the moment when she felt his mouth on hers, when she felt the shape of his mouth both as an absolute shape and as a liquid filling her body—then the motion of his lips down the line of her throat, a drinking motion that left a trail of bruises—then the sparkle of her diamond clip against the trembling copper of his hair.

Then she was conscious of nothing but the sensations of her body, because her body acquired the sudden power to let her know her most complex values by direct perception. Just as her eyes had the power to translate wave lengths of energy into sight, just as her ears had the power to translate vibrations into sound, so her body now had the power to translate the energy that had moved all the choices of her life, into immediate sensory perception. It was not the pressure of a hand that made her tremble, but the instantaneous sum of its meaning, the knowledge that it was *his* hand, that it moved as if her flesh were his possession, that its movement was his signature of acceptance under the whole of that achievement which was herself—it was only a sensation of physical pleasure, but it contained her worship of him, of everything that was his person and his life—from the night of the mass meeting in a factory in Wisconsin, to the Atlantis of a valley hidden in the Rocky Mountains, to the triumphant mockery of the green eyes of the superlative intelligence above a worker's figure at the foot of the tower—it contained her pride in herself and that it should be she whom he had chosen as his mirror, that it should be her body which was now giving him the sum of his existence, as his body was giving her the sum of hers. These were the things it contained—but what she knew was only the sensation of the movement of his hand on her breasts.

He tore off her cape and she felt the slenderness of her own body by means of the circle of his arms, as if his person were only a tool for her triumphant awareness of herself, but that self were only a tool for her awareness of him. It was as if she were reaching the limit of her capacity to feel, yet what she felt was like a cry of impatient demand, which she was now incapable of naming, except that it had the same quality of ambition as the course of her life, the same inexhaustible quality of radiant greed.

He pulled her head back for a moment, to look straight into her eyes, to let her see his, to let her know the full meaning of their actions, as if throwing the spotlight of consciousness upon them for the meeting of their eyes in a moment of intimacy greater than the one to come.

Then she felt the mesh of burlap striking the skin of her shoulders, she found herself lying on the broken sandbags, she saw the long, tight gleam of her stockings, she felt his mouth pressed to her ankle, then rising in a tortured motion up the line of her leg, as if he wished to own its shape by means of his lips, then she felt her teeth sinking into the flesh of his arm, she felt the sweep of his elbow knocking her head aside and his mouth seizing her lips with a pressure more viciously painful than hers—then she felt, when it hit her throat, that which she knew only as an upward streak of motion that released and united her body into a single shock of pleasure—then she knew nothing but the motion of his body and the driving greed that went reaching on and on, as if she were not a person any longer, only a sensation of endless reaching for the impossible—then she knew that it was possible, and she gasped and lay still, knowing that nothing more could be desired, ever.

He lay beside her, on his back, looking up at the darkness of the granite vault above them, she saw him stretched on the jagged slant of sandbags as if his body were fluid in relaxation, she saw the black wedge of her cape flung across the rails at their feet, there were beads of moisture twinkling on the vault, shifting slowly, running into invisible cracks, like the lights of a distant traffic. When he spoke, his voice sounded as if he were quietly continuing a sentence in answer to the questions in her mind, as if he had nothing to hide from her any longer and what he owed her now was only the act of undressing his soul, as simply as he would have undressed his body:

“.... this is how I’ve watched you for ten years ... from here, from under the ground under your feet ... knowing every move you made in your office at the top of the building, but never seeing you, never enough ... ten years of nights, spent waiting to catch a glimpse of you, here, on the platforms, when you boarded a train.... Whenever the order came down to couple your car, I’d know of it and wait and see you come down the ramp, and wish you didn’t walk so fast

... it was so much like you, that walk, I'd know it anywhere ... your walk and those legs of yours ... it was always your legs that I'd see first, hurrying down the ramp, going past me as I looked up at you from a dark side track below.... I think I could have molded a sculpture of your legs, I knew them, not with my eyes, but with the palms of my hands when I watched you go by ... when I turned back to my work ... when I went home just before sunrise for the three hours of sleep which I didn't get ...”

“I love you,” she said, her voice quiet and almost toneless except for a fragile sound of youth.

He closed his eyes, as if letting the sound travel through the years behind them. “Ten years, Dagny ... except that once there were a few weeks when I had you before me, in plain sight, within reach, not hurrying away, but held still, as on a lighted stage, a private stage for me to watch ... and I watched you for hours through many evenings ... in the lighted window of an office that was called the John Galt Line.... And one night—”

Her breath was a faint gasp. “Was it you, that night?”

“Did you see me?”

“I saw your shadow ... on the pavement ... pacing back and forth ... it looked like a struggle ... it looked like—” She stopped; she did not want to say “torture.”

“It was,” he said quietly. “That night, I wanted to walk in, to face you, to speak, to ... That was the night I came closest to breaking my oath, when I saw you slumped across your desk, when I saw you broken by the burden you were carrying—”

“John, that night, it was you that I was thinking of ... only I didn't know it ...”

“But, you see, *I* knew it.”

“.... it was you, all my life, through everything I did and everything I wanted ...”

“I know it.”

“John, the hardest was not when I left you in the valley ... it was—”

“Your radio speech, the day you returned?”

“Yes! Were you listening?”

“Of course. I'm glad you did it. It was a magnificent thing to do. And I—I knew it, anyway.”

“You knew ... about Hank Rearden?”

“Before I saw you in the valley.”

“Was it ... when you learned about him, had you expected it?”

“No.”

“Was it ... ?” she stopped.

“Hard? Yes. But only for the first few days. That next night ... Do you want me to tell you what I did the night after I learned it?”

“Yes.”

“I had never seen Hank Rearden, only pictures of him in the newspapers. I knew that he was in New York, that night, at some conference of big industrialists. I wanted to have just one look at him. I went to wait at the entrance of the hotel where that conference was held. There were bright lights under the marquee of the entrance, but it was dark beyond, on the pavement, so I could see without being seen, there were a few loafers and vagrants hanging around, there was a drizzle of rain and we clung to the walls of the building. One could tell the members of the conference when they began filing out, by their clothes and their manner—ostentatiously prosperous clothes and a manner of overbearing timidity, as if they were guiltily trying to pretend that they were what they appeared to be for that moment. There were chauffeurs driving up their cars, there were a few reporters delaying them for questions and hangers-on trying to catch a word from them. They were worn men, those industrialists, aging, flabby, frantic with the effort to disguise uncertainty. And then I saw him. He wore an expensive trenchcoat and a hat slanting across his eyes. He walked swiftly, with the kind of assurance that has to be earned, as he’d earned it. Some of his fellow industrialists pounced on him with questions, and those tycoons were acting like hangers-on around him. I caught a glimpse of him as he stood with his hand on the door of his car, his head lifted, I saw the brief flare of a smile under the slanting brim, a confident smile, impatient and a little amused. And then, for one instant, I did what I had never done before, what most men wreck their lives on doing—I saw that moment out of context, I saw the world as he made it look, as if it matched him, as if he were its symbol—I saw a world of achievement, of unenslaved energy, of unobstructed drive through purposeful years to the enjoyment of one’s reward—I saw, as I stood in the rain in a crowd of vagrants, what my years would have brought me, if that world had existed, and I felt a desperate longing—he was the image of everything I should have been ... and he had everything that should have been mine.... But it was only a moment. Then I saw the scene in full context again and in all of its actual meaning—I saw what price he was paying for his brilliant ability, what torture he was enduring in silent bewilderment, struggling to understand what *I* had understood—I saw that the world he suggested, did not exist and was yet to be made, I saw him again for what he was, the symbol of my battle, the unrewarded hero whom *I* was to avenge and to release—and then ... then I accepted what I had learned about you and him. I saw that it changed nothing, that I should have expected it—that it was right.”

He heard the faint sound of her moan and he chuckled softly.

“Dagny, it’s not that I don’t suffer, it’s that I know the unimportance of suffering, I know that pain is to be fought and thrown aside, not to be accepted as part of one’s soul and as a permanent scar across one’s view of existence. Don’t feel sorry for me. It was gone right then.”

She turned her head to look at him in silence, and he smiled, lifting himself on an elbow to look down at her face as she lay helplessly still. She whispered, “You’ve been a track laborer, here—here!—for twelve years ...”

“Yes.”

“Ever since—”

“Ever since I quit the Twentieth Century.”

“The night when you saw me for the first time ... you were working here, then?”

“Yes. And the morning when you offered to work for me as my cook, I was only your track laborer on leave of absence. Do you see why I laughed as I did?”

She was looking up at his face; hers was a smile of pain, his—of pure gaiety. “John ...”

“Say it. But say it all.”

“You were here ... all those years ...”

“Yes.”

“... all those years ... while the railroad was perishing ... while I was searching for men of intelligence ... while I was struggling to hold onto any scrap of it I could find ...”

“... while you were combing the country for the inventor of my motor, while you were feeding James Taggart and Wesley Mouch, while you were naming your best achievement after the enemy whom you wanted to destroy.”

She closed her eyes.

“I was here all those years,” he said, “within your reach, inside your own realm, watching your struggle, your loneliness, your longing, watching you in a battle you thought you were fighting for me, a battle in which you were supporting my enemies and taking an endless defeat -I was here, hidden by nothing but an error of your sight, as Atlantis is hidden from men by nothing but an optical illusion—I was here, waiting for the day when you would see, when you would know that by the code of the world you were supporting, it’s to the darkest bottom of the underground that all the things you valued would have to be consigned and that it’s there that you would have to look. I was here. I was waiting for you. I love you, Dagny. I love you more than my life, I who have taught men how life is to be loved. I’ve taught them also never to expect the unpaid for-and what I did tonight, I did it with full knowledge that I would pay

for it and that my life might have to be the price.”

“No!”

He smiled, nodding. “Oh yes. You know that you’ve broken me for once, that I broke the decision I had set for myself—but I did it consciously, knowing what it meant, I did it, not in blind surrender to the moment, but with full sight of the consequences and full willingness to bear them. I could not let this kind of moment pass us by, it was ours, my love, we had earned it. But you’re not ready to quit and join me—you don’t have to tell me, I know—and since I chose to take what I wanted before it was fully mine, I’ll have to pay for it, I have no way of knowing how or when, I know only that if I give in to an enemy, I’ll take the consequences.” He smiled in answer to the look on her face. “No, Dagny, you’re not my enemy in mind—and *that* is what brought me to this—but you *are* in fact, in the course you’re pursuing, though you don’t see it yet, but I do. My actual enemies are of no danger to me. *You* are. You’re the only one who can lead them to find me. They would never have the capacity to know what I am, but with your help -they will.”

“No!”

“No, not by your intention. And you’re free to change your course, but so long as you follow it, you’re not free to escape its logic. Don’t frown, the choice was mine and it’s a danger I chose to accept. I am a trader, Dagny, in all things. I wanted you, I had no power to change your decision, I had only the power to consider the price and decide whether I could afford it. I could. My life is mine to spend or to invest—and you, you’re”—as if his gesture were continuing his sentence, he raised her across his arm and kissed her mouth, while her body hung limply in surrender, her hair streaming down, her head falling back, held only by the pressure of his lips—“you’re the one reward I had to have and chose to buy. I wanted you, and if my life is the price, I’ll give it. My life—but not my mind.”

There was a sudden glint of hardness in his eyes, as he sat up and smiled and asked, “Would you want me to join you and go to work? Would you like me to repair that interlocking signal system of yours within an hour?”

“No!” The cry was immediate—in answer to the flash of a sudden image, the image of the men in the private dining room of the Wayne-Falkland.

He laughed. “Why not?”

“I don’t want to see *you* working as their serf!”

“And yourself?”

“I think that they’re crumbling and that I’ll win. I can stand it just a little longer.”

“True, it’s just a little longer—not till you win, but till you learn.”

“I can’t let it go!” It was a cry of despair.

“Not yet,” he said quietly.

He got up, and she rose obediently, unable to speak.

“I will remain here, on my job,” he said. “But don’t try to see me. You’ll have to endure what I’ve endured and wanted to spare you—you’ll have to go on, knowing where I am, wanting me as I’ll want you, but never permitting yourself to approach me. Don’t seek me here. Don’t come to my home. Don’t ever let them see us together. And when you reach the end, when you’re ready to quit, don’t tell them, just chalk a dollar sign on the pedestal of Nat Taggart’s statue—where it belongs -then go home and wait. I’ll come for you in twenty-four hours.”

She inclined her head in silent promise.

But when he turned to go, a sudden shudder ran through her body, like a first jolt of awakening or a last convulsion of life, and it ended in an involuntary cry: “Where are you going?”

“To be a lamppost and stand holding a lantern till dawn—which is the only work your world relegates me to and the only work it’s going to get.”

She seized his arm, to hold him, to follow, to follow him blindly, abandoning everything but the sight of his face. “John!”

He gripped her wrist, twisted her hand and threw it off. “No,” he said.

Then he took her hand and raised it to his lips and the pressure of his mouth was more passionate a statement than any he had chosen to confess. Then he walked away, down the vanishing line of rail, and it seemed to her that both the rail and the figure were abandoning her at the same time.

When she staggered out into the concourse of the Terminal, the first blast of rolling wheels went shuddering through the walls of the building, like the sudden beat of a heart that had stopped. The temple of Nathaniel Taggart was silent and empty, its changeless light beating down on a deserted stretch of marble. Some shabby figures shuffled across it, as if lost in its shining expanse. On the steps of the pedestal, under the statue of the austere, exultant figure, a ragged bum sat slumped in passive resignation, like a wing-plucked bird with no place to go, resting on any chance cornice.

She fell down on the steps of the pedestal, like another derelict, her dust-smearred cape wrapped tightly about her, she sat still, her head on her arm, past crying or feeling or moving.

It seemed to her only that she kept seeing a figure with a raised arm holding a light, and it looked at times like the Statue of Liberty and then it looked like a man with sun-streaked hair, holding a lantern against a midnight sky, a red lantern that stopped the movement of the world.

“Don’t take it to heart, lady, whatever it is,” said the bum, in a tone of exhausted compassion. “Nothing’s to be done about it, anyway.... What’s the use, lady? Who is John Galt?”

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CHAPTER VII

“THIS IS JOHN GALT SPEAKING”

The doorbell was ringing like an alarm, in a long, demanding scream, broken by the impatient stabs of someone's frantic finger.

Leaping out of bed, Dagny noticed the cold, pale sunlight of late morning and a clock on a distant spire marking the hour of ten. She had worked at the office till four A.M. and had left word not to expect her till noon.

The white face ungroomed by panic, that confronted her when she threw the door open, was James Taggart.

“He's gone!” he cried.

“Who?”

“Hank Rearden! He's gone, quit, vanished, disappeared!”

She stood still for a moment, holding the belt of the dressing gown she had been tying; then, as the full knowledge reached her, her hands jerked the belt tight—as if snapping her body in two at the waistline—while she burst out laughing. It was a sound of triumph.

He stared at her in bewilderment. “What's the matter with you?” he gasped. “Haven't you understood?”

“Come in, Jim,” she said, turning contemptuously, walking into the living room. “Oh yes, I've understood.”

“He's quit! Gone! Gone like all the others! Left his mills, his bank accounts, his property, everything! Just vanished! Took some clothing and whatever he had in the safe in his apartment—they found a safe left open in his bedroom, open and empty—that's all! No word, no note, no explanation! They called me from Washington, but it's all over town! The news, I mean, the story! They can't keep it quiet! They've tried to, but ... Nobody knows how it got out, but it went through the mills like one of those furnace break-outs, the word that he'd gone, and then . . . before anyone could stop it, a whole bunch of them vanished! The superintendent, the chief metallurgist, the chief engineer, Rearden's secretary, even the hospital doctor! And God knows how many others! Deserting, the bastards! Deserting us, in spite of all the penalties we've set up! He's quit and the rest are quitting and those mills are just left there, standing still! Do you understand what that means?”

“Do *you*?” she asked.

He had thrown his story at her, sentence by sentence, as if trying to knock the smile off her face, an odd, unmoving smile of bitterness and triumph; he had failed. “It’s a national catastrophe! What’s the matter with you? Don’t you see that it’s a fatal blow? It will break the last of the country’s morale and economy! We can’t let him vanish! You’ve got to bring him back!”

Her smile disappeared.

“*You* can!” he cried. “You’re the only one who can! He’s your lover, isn’t he? ... Oh, don’t look like that! It’s no time for squeamishness! It’s no time for anything except that we’ve got to have him! You must know where he is! You can find him! You must reach him and bring him back!”

The way she now looked at him was worse than her smile—she looked as if she were seeing him naked and would not endure the sight much longer. “I can’t bring him back,” she said, not raising her voice. “And I wouldn’t, if I could. Now get out of here.”

“But the national catastrophe—”

“Get out.”

She did not notice his exit. She stood alone in the middle of her living room, her head dropping, her shoulders sagging, while she was smiling, a smile of pain, of tenderness, of greeting to Hank Rearden. She wondered dimly why she should feel so glad that he had found liberation, so certain that he was right, and yet refuse herself the same deliverance. Two sentences were beating in her mind; one was the triumphant sweep of: He’s free, he’s out of their reach!—the other was like a prayer of dedication: There’s still a chance to win, but let me be the only victim....

It was strange—she thought, in the days that followed, looking at the men around her—that catastrophe had made them aware of Hank Rearden with an intensity that his achievements had not aroused, as if the paths of their consciousness were open to disaster, but not to value. Some spoke of him in shrill curses—others whispered, with a look of guilt and terror, as if a nameless retribution were now to descend upon them—some tried, with hysterical evasiveness, to act as if nothing had happened.

The newspapers, like puppets on tangled strings, were shouting with the same belligerence and on the same dates: “It is social treason to ascribe too much importance to Hank Rearden’s desertion and to undermine public morale by the old-fashioned belief that an individual can be of any significance to society.” “It is social treason to spread rumors about the disappearance of Hank Rearden. Mr. Rearden has not disappeared, he is in his office, running his mills, as usual, and there has been no trouble at Rearden Steel, except a minor disturbance, a private scuffle among some workers.” “It is social treason to cast an unpatriotic light

upon the tragic loss of Hank Rearden. Mr. Rearden has not deserted, he was killed in an automobile accident on his way to work, and his grief-stricken family has insisted on a private funeral.”

It was strange, she thought, to obtain news by means of nothing but denials, as if existence had ceased, facts had vanished and only the frantic negatives uttered by officials and columnists gave any clue to the reality they were denying. “It is not true that the Miller Steel Foundry of New Jersey has gone out of business.” “It is not true that the Jansen Motor Company of Michigan has closed its doors.” “It is a vicious, anti-social lie that manufacturers of steel products are collapsing under the threat of a steel shortage. There is no reason to expect a steel shortage.” “It is a slanderous, unfounded rumor that a Steel Unification Plan had been in the making and that it had been favored by Mr. Orren Boyle. Mr. Boyle’s attorney has issued an emphatic denial and has assured the press that Mr. Boyle is now vehemently opposed to any such plan. Mr. Boyle, at the moment, is suffering from a nervous breakdown.”

But some news could be witnessed in the streets of New York, in the cold, dank twilight of autumn evenings: a crowd gathered in front of a hardware store, where the owner had thrown the doors open, inviting people to help themselves to the last of his meager stock, while he laughed in shrieking sobs and went smashing his plate-glass windows—a crowd gathered at the door of a run-down apartment house, where a police ambulance stood waiting, while the bodies of a man, his wife and their three children were being removed from a gas-filled room; the man had been a small manufacturer of steel castings.

If they see Hank Rearden’s value now—she thought—why didn’t they see it sooner? Why hadn’t they a

In the silence of sleepless nights, she thought that Hank Rearden and she had now changed places: he was in Atlantis and she was locked out by a screen of light—he was, perhaps, calling to her as she had called to his struggling airplane, but no signal could reach her through that screen.

Yet the screen split open for one brief break—for the length of a letter she received a week after he vanished. The envelope bore no return address, only the postmark of some hamlet in Colorado. The letter contained two sentences: .

I have met him. I don’t blame you.

H.R.

She sat still for a long time, looking at the letter, as if unable to move or to feel. She felt nothing, she thought, then noticed that her shoulders were trembling in a faint, continuous shudder, then grasped that the tearing violence within her was made of an exultant tribute, of gratitude and of despair—her

tribute to the victory that the meeting of these two men implied, the final victory of both—her gratitude that those in Atlantis still regarded her as one of them and had granted her the exception of receiving a message—the despair of the knowledge that her blankness was a struggle not to hear the questions she was now hearing. Had Galt abandoned her? Had he gone to the valley to meet his greatest conquest? Would he come back? Had he given her up? The unendurable was not that these questions had no answer, but that the answer was so simply, so easily within her reach and that she had no right to take a step to reach it.

She had made no attempt to see him. Every morning, for a month, on entering her office, she had been conscious, not of the room around her, but of the tunnels below, under the floors of the building—and she had worked, feeling as if some marginal part of her brain was computing figures, reading reports, making decisions in a rush of lifeless activity, while her living mind was inactive and still, frozen in contemplation, forbidden to move beyond the sentence: He's down there. The only inquiry she had permitted herself had been a glance at the payroll list of the Terminal workers. She had seen the name: Galt, John. The list had carried it, openly, for over twelve years. She had seen an address next to the name—and, for a month, had struggled to forget it.

It had seemed hard to live through that month—yet now, as she looked at the letter, the thought that Galt had gone was still harder to bear. Even the struggle of resisting his proximity had been a link to him, a price to pay, a victory achieved in his name. Now there was nothing, except a question that was not to be asked. His presence in the tunnels had been her motor through those days—just as his presence in the city had been her motor through the months of that summer—just as his presence somewhere in the world had been her motor through the years before she ever heard his name. Now she felt as if her motor, too, had stopped.

She went on, with the bright, pure glitter of a five-dollar gold piece, which she kept in her pocket, as her last drop of fuel. She went on, protected from the world around her by a last armor: indifference.

The newspapers did not mention the outbreaks of violence that had begun to burst across the country—but she watched them through the reports of train conductors about bullet-riddled cars, dismantled tracks, attacked trains, besieged stations, in Nebraska, in Oregon, in Texas, in Montana—the futile, doomed outbreaks, prompted by nothing but despair, ending in nothing but destruction. Some were the explosions of local gangs; some spread wider. There were districts that rose in blind rebellion, arrested the local officials, expelled the agents of Washington, killed the tax collectors—then, announcing their secession from the country, went on to the final extreme of the very evil that had

destroyed them, as if fighting murder with suicide: went on to seize all property within their reach, to declare community bondage of all to all, and to perish within a week, their meager loot consumed, in the bloody hatred of all for all, in the chaos of no rule save that of the gun, to perish under the lethargic thrust of a few worn soldiers sent out from Washington to bring order to the ruins.

The newspapers did not mention it. The editorials went on speaking of self-denial as the road to future progress, of self-sacrifice as the moral imperative, of greed as the enemy, of love as the solution—their threadbare phrases as sickeningly sweet as the odor of ether in a hospital.

Rumors went spreading through the country in whispers of cynical terror—yet people read the newspapers and acted as if they believed what they read, each competing with the others on who would keep most blindly silent, each pretending that he did not know what he knew, each striving to believe that the unnamed was the unreal. It was as if a volcano were cracking open, yet the people at the foot of the mountain ignored the sudden fissures, the black fumes, the boiling trickles, and went on believing that their only danger was to acknowledge the reality of these signs.

“Listen to Mr. Thompson’s report on the world crisis, November 22!”

It was the first acknowledgment of the unacknowledged. The announcements began to appear a week in advance and went ringing across the country. “Mr. Thompson will give the people a report on the world crisis! Listen to Mr. Thompson on every radio station and television channel at 8 P.M., on November 22!”

First, the front pages of the newspapers and the shouts of the radio voices had explained it: “To counteract the fears and rumors spread by the enemies of the people, Mr. Thompson will address the country on November 22 and will give us a full report on the state of the world in this solemn moment of global crisis. Mr. Thompson will put an end to those sinister forces whose purpose is to keep us in terror and despair. He will bring light into the darkness of the world and will show us the way out of our tragic problems—a stern way, as befits the gravity of this hour, but a way of glory, as granted by the rebirth of light. Mr. Thompson’s address will be carried by every radio station in this country and in all countries throughout the world, wherever radio waves may still be heard.”

Then the chorus broke loose and went growing day by day. “Listen to Mr. Thompson on November 22!” said daily headlines. “Don’t forget Mr. Thompson on November 22!” cried radio stations at the end of every program. “Mr. Thompson will tell you the truth!” said placards in subways and buses—then posters on the walls of buildings -then billboards on deserted highways.

“Don’t despair! Listen to Mr. Thompson!” said pennants on government cars.

“Don’t give up! Listen to Mr. Thompson!” said banners in offices and shops. “Have faith! Listen to Mr. Thompson!” said voices in churches. “Mr. Thompson will give you the answer!” wrote army airplanes across the sky, g in space, and only the last two words remaining by the time the sentence was completed.

Public loud-speakers were built in the squares of New York for the day of the speech, and came to rasping life once an hour, in time with the ringing of distant clocks, to send over the worn rattle of the traffic, over the heads of the shabby crowds, the sonorous, mechanical cry of an alarm-toned voice: “Listen to Mr. Thompson’s report on the world crisis, November 22!”—a cry rolling through the frosted air and vanishing among the foggy roof tops, under the blank page of a calendar that bore no date.

On the afternoon of November 22, James Taggart told Dagny that Mr. Thompson wished to meet her for a conference before the broadcast. .

“In Washington?” she asked incredulously, glancing at her watch.

“Well, I must say that you haven’t been reading the newspapers or keeping track of important events. Don’t you know that Mr. Thompson is to broadcast from New York? He has come here to confer with the leaders of industry, as well as of labor, science, the professions, and the best of the country’s leadership in general. He has requested that I bring you to the conference.”

“Where is it to be held?”

“At the broadcasting studio.”

“They don’t expect me to speak on the air in support of their policies, do they?”

“Don’t worry, they wouldn’t let *you* near a microphone! They just want to hear your opinion, and you can’t refuse, not in a national emergency, not when it’s an invitation from Mr. Thompson in person!” He spoke impatiently, avoiding her eyes.

“When is that conference to be held?”

“At seven-thirty.”

“Not much time to give to a conference about a national emergency, is it?”

“Mr. Thompson is a very busy man. Now please don’t argue, don’t start being difficult, I don’t see what you. ‘re—”

“All right,” she said indifferently, “I’ll come,” and added, prompted by the kind of feeling that would have made her reluctant to venture without a witness into a conference of gangsters, “but I’ll bring Eddie Willers along with me.”

He frowned, considering it for a moment, with a look of annoyance more than anxiety. “Oh, all right, if you wish,” he snapped, shrugging.

She came to the broadcasting studio with James Taggart as a policeman at one side of her and Eddie Willers as a bodyguard at the other. Taggart’s face was

resentful and tense, Eddie.‘s—resigned, yet wondering and curious. A stage set of pasteboard walls had been erected in a corner of the vast, dim space, representing a stiffly traditional suggestion of a cross between a stately drawing room and a modest study. A semicircle of empty armchairs filled the set, suggesting a grouping from a family album, with microphones dangling like bait at the end of long poles extended for fishing among the chairs.

The best leadership of the country, that stood about in nervous clusters, had the look of a remnant sale in a bankrupt store: she saw Wesley Mouch, Eugene Lawson, Chick Morrison, Tinky Holloway, Dr. Floyd Ferris, Dr. Simon Pritchett, Ma Chalmers, Fred Kinnan, and a seedy handful of businessmen among whom the half-scared, half-flattered figure of Mr. Mowen of the Amalgamated Switch and Signal Company was, incredibly, intended to represent an industrial tycoon.

But the figure that gave her an instant’s shock was Dr. Robert Stadler. She had not known that a face could age so greatly within the brief space of one year: the look of timeless energy, of boyish eagerness, was gone, and nothing remained of the face except the lines of contemptuous bitterness. He stood alone, apart from the others, and she saw the moment when his eyes saw her enter; he looked like a man in a whorehouse who had accepted the nature of his surroundings until suddenly caught there by his wife: it was a look of guilt in the process of becoming hatred. Then she saw Robert Stadler, the scientist, turn away as if he had not seen her—as if his refusal to see could wipe a fact out of existence.

Mr. Thompson was pacing among the groups, snapping at random bystanders, in the restless manner of a man of action who feels contempt for the duty of making speeches. He was clutching a sheaf of typewritten pages, as if it were a bundle of old clothing about to be discarded.

James Taggart caught him in mid-step, to say uncertainly and loudly, “Mr. Thompson, may I present my sister, Miss Dagny Taggart?”

“So nice of you to come, Miss Taggart,” said Mr. Thompson, shaking her hand as if she were another voter from back home whose name he had never heard before; then he marched briskly off.

“Where’s the conference, Jim?” she asked, and glanced at the clock: it was a huge white dial with a black hand slicing the minutes, like a knife moving toward the hour of eight.

“I can’t help it! I don’t run this show!” he snapped.

Eddie Willers glanced at her with a look of bitterly patient astonishment, and stepped closer to her side.

A radio receiver was playing a program of military marches broadcast from another studio, half-drowning the fragments of nervous voices, of hastily aimless

steps, of screeching machinery being pulled to focus upon the drawing-room set.

“Stay tuned to hear Mr. Thompson’s report on the world crisis at eight P.M.!” cried the martial voice of an announcer, from the radio receiver—when the hand on the dial reached the hour of 7:45.

“Step on it, boys, step on it!” snapped Mr. Thompson, while the radio burst into another march.

It was 7:50 when Chick Morrison, the Morale Conditioner, who seemed to be in charge, cried, “All right, boys and girls, all right, let’s take our places!” waving a bunch of notepaper, like a baton, toward the light-flooded circle of armchairs.

Mr. Thompson thudded down upon the central chair, in the manner of grabbing a vacant seat in a subway.

Chick Morrison’s assistants were herding the crowd toward the circle of light.

“A happy family,” Chick Morrison explained, “the country must see us as a big, united, happy—What’s the matter with that thing?” The radio music had gone off abruptly, choking on an odd little gasp of static, cut in the middle of a ringing phrase. It was 7:51. He shrugged and went on: “—happy family. Hurry up, boys. Take close-ups of Mr. Thompson, first.”

The hand of the clock went slicing off the minutes, while press photographers clicked their cameras at Mr. Thompson’s sourly impatient face.

“Mr. Thompson will sit between science and industry!” Chick Morrison announced. “Dr. Stadler, please—the chair on Mr. Thompson’s left. Miss Taggart—this way, please—on Mr. Thompson’s right.”

Dr. Stadler obeyed. She did not move.

“It’s not just for the press, it’s for the television audiences,” Chick Morrison explained to her, in the tone of an inducement.

She made a step forward. “I will not take part in this program,” she said evenly, addressing Mr. Thompson.

“You won’t?” he asked blankly, with the kind of look he would have worn if one of the flower vases had suddenly refused to perform its part.

“Dagny, for Christ’s sake!” cried James Taggart in panic.

“What’s the matter with her?” asked Mr. Thompson.

“But, Miss Taggart! Why?” cried Chick Morrison.

“You all know why,” she said to the faces around her. “You should have known better than to try that again.”

“Miss Taggart!” yelled Chick Morrison, as she turned to go. “It’s a national emer—”

Then a man came rushing toward Mr. Thompson, and she stopped, as did everyone else—and the look on the man’s face swept the crowd into an abruptly

total silence. He was the station's chief engineer, and it was odd to see a look of primitive terror struggling against his remnant of civilized control.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "we . . . we might have to delay the broadcast."

"*What?*" cried Mr. Thompson.

The hand of the dial stood at 7:58.

"We're trying to fix it, Mr. Thompson, we're trying to find out what it is ... but we might not be on time and—"

"What are you talking about? What happened?"

"We're trying to locate the—"

"What happened?"

"I don't know! But ... We .. we can't get on the air, Mr. Thompson."

There was a moment of silence, then Mr. Thompson asked, his voice unnaturally low, "Are you crazy?"

"I must be. I wish I were. I can't make it out. The station is dead."

"Mechanical trouble?" yelled Mr. Thompson, leaping to his feet. "Mechanical trouble, God damn you, at a time like this? If that's how you run this station—"

The chief engineer shook his head slowly, in the manner of an adult who is reluctant to frighten a child. "It's not this station, Mr. Thompson," he said softly. "It's every station in the country, as far as we've been able to check. And there is no mechanical trouble. Neither here nor elsewhere. The equipment is in order, in perfect order, and they all report the same, but ... but all radio stations went off the air at seven-fifty-one, and ... and nobody can discover why."

"But—" cried Mr. Thompson, stopped, glanced about him and screamed, "Not tonight! You can't let it happen tonight! You've got to get me on the air!"

"Mr. Thompson," the man said slowly, "we've called the electronic laboratory of the State Science Institute. They ... they've never seen anything like it. They said it might be a natural phenomenon, some sort of cosmic disturbance of an unprecedented kind, only—"

"Well?"

"Only they don't think it is. We don't, either. They said it looks like radio waves, but of a frequency never produced before, never observed anywhere, never discovered by anybody."

No one answered him. In a moment, he went on, his voice oddly solemn: "It looks like a wall of radio waves jamming the air, and we can't get through it, we can't touch it, we can't break it.... What's more, we can't locate its source, not by any of our usual methods.... Those waves seem to come from a transmitter that ... that makes any known to us look like a child's toy!"

"But that's not possible!" The cry came from behind Mr. Thompson and they all whirled in its direction, startled by its note of peculiar terror; it came from Dr.

Stadler. "There's no such thing! There's nobody on earth to make it!"

The chief engineer spread his hands out. "That's it, Dr. Stadler," he said wearily. "It can't be possible. It shouldn't be possible. But there it is."

"Well, do something about it!" cried Mr. Thompson to the crowd at large.

No one answered or moved.

"I won't permit this!" cried Mr. Thompson. "I won't permit it! Tonight of all nights! I've got to make that speech! Do something! Solve it, whatever it is! I order you to solve it!"

The chief engineer was looking at him blankly.

"I'll fire the lot of you for this! I'll fire every electronic engineer in the country! I'll put the whole profession on trial for sabotage, desertion and treason! Do you hear me? Now do something, God damn you! Do something!"

The chief engineer was looking at him impassively, as if words were not conveying anything any longer.

"Isn't there anybody around to obey an order?" cried Mr. Thompson. "Isn't there a brain left in this country?"

The hand of the clock reached the dot of 8:00.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said a voice that came from the radio receiver—a man's clear, calm, implacable voice, the kind of voice that had not been heard on the airwaves for years—"Mr. Thompson will not speak to you tonight. His time is up. I have taken it over. You were to hear a report on the world crisis. That is what you are going to hear."

Three gasps of recognition greeted the voice, but nobody had the power to notice them among the sounds of the crowd, which were beyond the stage of cries. One was a gasp of triumph, another—of terror, the third—of bewilderment. Three persons had recognized the speaker: Dagny, Dr. Stadler, Eddie Willers. Nobody glanced at Eddie Willers; but Dagny and Dr. Stadler glanced at each other. She saw that his face was distorted by as evil a terror as one could ever bear to see; he saw that she knew and that the way she looked at him was as if the speaker had slapped his face.

"For twelve years, you have been asking: Who is John Galt? This is John Galt speaking. I am the man who loves his life. I am the man who does not sacrifice his love or his values. I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—I am the man who will now tell you."

The chief engineer was the only one able to move; he ran to a television set and struggled frantically with its dials. But the screen remained empty; the speaker had not chosen to be seen. Only his voice filled the airways of the country—of the world, thought the chief engineer—sounding as if he were

speaking here, in this room, not to a group, but to one man; it was not the tone of addressing a meeting, but the tone of addressing a mind.

“You have heard it said that this is an age of moral crisis. You have said it yourself, half in fear, half in hope that the words had no meaning. You have cried that man’s sins are destroying the world and you have cursed human nature for its unwillingness to practice the virtues you demanded. Since virtue, to you, consists of sacrifice, you have demanded more sacrifices at every successive disaster. In the name of a return to morality, you have sacrificed all those evils which you held as the cause of your plight. You have sacrificed justice to mercy. You have sacrificed independence to unity. You have sacrificed reason to faith. You have sacrificed wealth to need. You have sacrificed self-esteem to self-denial. You have sacrificed happiness to duty.

“You have destroyed all that which you held to be evil and achieved all that which you held to be good. Why, then, do you shrink in horror from the sight of the world around you? That world is not the product of your sins, it is the product and the image of your virtues. It is your moral ideal brought into reality in its full and final perfection. You have fought for it, you have dreamed of it, you have wished it, and I -I am the man who has granted you your wish.

“Your ideal had an implacable enemy, which your code of morality was designed to destroy. I have withdrawn that enemy. I have taken it out of your way and out of your reach. I have removed the source of all those evils you were sacrificing one by one. I have ended your battle. I have stopped your motor. I have deprived your world of man’s mind.

“Men do not live by the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those who do. The mind is impotent, you say? I have withdrawn those whose mind isn’t. There are values higher than the mind, you say? I have withdrawn those for whom there aren’t.

“While you were dragging to your sacrificial altars the men of justice, of independence, of reason, of wealth, of self-esteem—I beat you to it, I reached them first. I told them the nature of the game you were playing and the nature of that moral code of yours, which they had been too innocently generous to grasp. I showed them the way to live by another morality-mine. It is mine that they chose to follow.

“All the men who have vanished, the men you hated, yet dreaded to lose, it is I who have taken them away from you. Do not attempt to find us. We do not choose to be found. Do not cry that it is our duty to serve you. We do not recognize such duty. Do not cry that you need us. We do not consider need a claim. Do not cry that you own us. You don’t. Do not beg us to return. We are on strike, we, the men of the mind.

“We are on strike against self-immolation. We are on strike against the creed of unearned rewards and unrewarded duties. We are on strike against the dogma that the pursuit of one’s happiness is evil. We are on strike against the doctrine that life is guilt.

“There is a difference between our strike and all those you’ve practiced for centuries: our strike consists, not of making demands, but of granting them. We are evil, according to your morality. We have chosen not to harm you any longer. We are useless, according to your economics. We have chosen not to exploit you any longer. We are dangerous and to be shackled, according to your politics. We have chosen not to endanger you, nor to wear the shackles any longer. We are only an illusion, according to your philosophy. We have chosen not to blind you any longer and have left you free to face reality—the reality you wanted, the world as you see it now, a world without mind.

“We have granted you everything you demanded of us, we who had always been the givers, but have only now understood it. We have no demands to present to you, no terms to bargain about, no compromise to reach. You have nothing to offer us. *We do not need you.*

“Are you now crying: No, this was not what you wanted? A mindless world of ruins was not your goal? You did not want us to leave you? You moral cannibals, I know that you’ve always known what it was that you wanted. But your game is up, because now we know it, .too.

“Through centuries of scourges and disasters, brought about by your code of morality, you have cried that your code had been broken, that the scourges were punishment for breaking it, that men were too weak and too selfish to spill all the blood it required. You damned man, you damned existence, you damned this earth, but never dared to question your code. Your victims took the blame and struggled on, with your curses as reward for their martyrdom—while you went on crying that your code was noble, but human nature was not good enough to practice it. And no one rose to ask the question: Good?—by what standard?

“You wanted to know John Galt’s identity. I am the man who has asked that question.

“Yes, this is an age of moral crisis. Yes, you *are* bearing punishment for your evil. But it is not man who is now on trial and it is not human nature that will take the blame. It is your moral code that’s through, this time. Your moral code has reached its climax, the blind alley at the end of its course. And if you wish to go on living, what you now need is not to *return* to morality—you who have never known any—but to *discover* it.

“You have heard no concepts of morality but the mystical or the social. You have been taught that morality is a code of behavior imposed on you by whim,

the whim of a supernatural power or the whim of society, to serve God's purpose or your neighbor's welfare, to please an authority beyond the grave or else next door—but not to serve *your* life or pleasure. Your pleasure, you have been taught, is to be found in immorality, your interests would best be served by evil, and any moral code must be designed not *for* you, but *against* you, not to further your life, but to drain it.

“For centuries, the battle of morality was fought between those who claimed that your life belongs to God and those who claimed that it belongs to your neighbors—between those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of ghosts in heaven and those who preached that the good is self-sacrifice for the sake of incompetents on earth. And no one came to say that your life belongs to you and that the good is to live it.

“Both sides agreed that morality demands the surrender of your self-interest and of your mind, that the moral and the practical are opposites, that morality is not the province of reason, but the province of faith and force. Both sides agreed that no rational morality is possible, that there is no right or wrong in reason—that in reason there's no reason to be moral.

“Whatever else they fought about, it was against man's mind that all your moralists have stood united. It was man's mind that all their schemes and systems were intended to despoil and destroy. Now choose to perish or to learn that the anti-mind is the anti-life.

“Man's mind is his basic tool of survival. Life is given to him, survival is not. His body is given to him, its sustenance is not. His mind is given to him, its content is not. To remain alive, he must act, and before he can act he must know the nature and purpose of his action. He cannot obtain his food without a knowledge of food and of the way to obtain it. He cannot dig a ditch—or build a cyclotron—without a knowledge of his aim and of the means to achieve it. To remain alive, he must think.

“But to think is an act of choice. The key to what you so recklessly call ‘human nature,’ the open secret you live with, yet dread to name, is the fact that *man is a being of volitional consciousness*. Reason does not work automatically; thinking is not a mechanical process; the connections of logic are not made by instinct. The function of your stomach, lungs or heart is automatic; the function of your mind is not. In any hour and issue of your life, you are free to think or to evade that effort. But you are not free to escape from your nature, from the fact that *reason* is your means of survival—so that for *you*, who are a human being, the question ‘to be or not to be’ is the question ‘to think or not to think.’

“A being of volitional consciousness has no automatic course of behavior. He needs a code of values to guide his actions. ‘Value’ is that which one acts to gain

and keep, 'virtue' is the action by which one gains and keeps it. 'Value' presupposes an answer to the question: of value to whom and for what? 'Value' presupposes a standard, a purpose and the necessity of action in the face of an alternative. Where there are no alternatives, no values are possible.

"There is only one fundamental alternative in the universe: existence or non-existence-and it pertains to a single class of entities: to living organisms. The existence of inanimate matter is unconditional, the existence of life is not: it depends on a specific course of action. Matter is indestructible, it changes its forms, but it cannot cease to exist. It is only a living organism that faces a constant alternative: the issue of life or death. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generated action. If an organism fails in that action, it dies; its chemical elements remain, but its life goes out of existence. It is only the concept of 'Life' that makes the concept of 'Value' possible. It is only to a living entity that things can be good or evil.

"A plant must feed itself in order to live; the sunlight, the water, the chemicals it needs are the values its nature has set it to pursue; its life is the standard of value directing its actions. But a plant has no choice of action; there are alternatives in the conditions it encounters, but there is no alternative in its function: it acts automatically to further its life, it cannot act for its own destruction.

"An animal is equipped for sustaining its life; its senses provide it with an automatic code of action, an automatic knowledge of what is good for it or evil. It has no power to extend its knowledge or to evade it. In conditions where its knowledge proves inadequate, it dies. But so long as it lives, it acts on its knowledge, with automatic safety and no power of choice, it is unable to ignore its own good, unable to decide to choose the evil and act as its own destroyer.

"Man has no automatic code of survival. His particular distinction from all other living species is the necessity to act in the face of alternatives by means of *volitional choice*. He has no automatic knowledge of what is good for him or evil, what values his life depends on, what course of action it requires. Are you prattling about an instinct of self-preservation? An *instinct* of self-preservation is precisely what man does not possess. An 'instinct' is an unerring and automatic form of knowledge. A desire is not an instinct. A desire to live does not give you the knowledge required for living. And even man's desire to live is not automatic: your secret evil today is that *that* is the desire you do not hold. Your fear of death is not a love for life and will not give you the knowledge needed to keep it. Man must obtain his knowledge and choose his actions by a process of thinking, which nature will not force him to perform. Man has the power to act as his own destroyer—and that is the way he has acted through most of his

history.

“A living entity that regarded its means of survival as evil, would not survive. A plant that struggled to mangle its roots, a bird that fought to break its wings would not remain for long in the existence they affronted. But the history of man has been a struggle to deny and to destroy his mind.

“Man has been called a rational being, but rationality is a matter of choice—and the alternative his nature offers him is: rational being or suicidal animal. Man has to be man—by choice; he has to hold his life as a value—by choice; he has to learn to sustain it—by choice; he has to discover the values it requires and practice his virtues—by choice.

“A code of values accepted by choice is a code of morality.

“Whoever you are, you who are hearing me now, I am speaking to whatever living remnant is left uncorrupted within you, to the remnant of the human, to your *mind*, and I say: There is a morality of reason, a morality proper to man, and *Man’s Life* is its standard of value.

“All that which is proper to the life of a rational being is the good; all that which destroys it is the evil.

“Man’s life, as required by his nature, is not the life of a mindless brute, of a looting thug or a mooching mystic, but the life of a thinking being—not life by means of force or fraud, but life by means of achievement—not survival at any price, since there’s only one price that pays for man’s survival: reason.

“Man’s life is the *standard* of morality, but your own life is its *purpose*. If existence on earth is your goal, you must choose your actions and values by the standard of that which is proper to man—for the purpose of preserving, fulfilling and enjoying the irreplaceable value which is your life.

“Since life requires a specific course of action, any other course will destroy it. A being who does not hold his own life as the motive and goal of his actions, is acting on the motive and standard of *death*. Such a being is a metaphysical monstrosity, struggling to oppose, negate and contradict the fact of his own existence, running blindly amuck on a trail of destruction, capable of nothing but pain.

“Happiness is the successful state of life, pain is an agent of death. Happiness is that state of consciousness which proceeds from the achievement of one’s values. A morality that dares to tell you to find happiness in the renunciation of your happiness—to value the failure of your values—is an insolent negation of morality. A doctrine that gives you, as an ideal, the role of a sacrificial animal seeking slaughter on the altars of others, is giving you *death* as your standard. By the grace of reality and the nature of life, man—every man—is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is

his highest moral purpose.

“But neither life nor happiness can be achieved by the pursuit of irrational whims. Just as man is free to attempt to survive in any random manner, but will perish unless he lives as his nature requires, so he is free to seek his happiness in any mindless fraud, but the torture of frustration is all he will find, unless he seeks the happiness proper to man. The purpose of morality is to teach you, not to suffer and die, but to enjoy yourself and live.

“Sweep aside those parasites of subsidized classrooms, who live on the profits of the mind of others and proclaim that man needs no morality, no values, no code of behavior. They, who pose as scientists and claim that man is only an animal, do not grant him inclusion in the law of existence they have granted to the lowest of insects. They recognize that every living species has a way of survival demanded by its nature, they do not claim that a fish can live out of water or that a dog can live without its sense of smell—but man, they claim, the most complex of beings, man can survive in any way whatever, man has no identity, no nature, and there’s no practical reason why he cannot live with his means of survival destroyed, with his mind throttled and placed at the disposal of any orders *they* might care to issue.

“Sweep aside those hatred-eaten mystics, who pose as friends of humanity and preach that the highest virtue man can practice is to hold his own life as of no value. Do they tell you that the purpose of morality is to curb man’s instinct of self-preservation? It is for the purpose of self-preservation that man needs a code of morality. The only man who desires to be moral is the man who desires to live.

“No, you do not have to live; it is your basic act of choice; but if you choose to live, you must live as a man—by the work and the judgment of your mind.

“No, you do not have to live as a man; it is an act of moral choice. But you cannot live as anything else—and the alternative is that state of living death which you now see within you and around you, the state of a thing unfit for existence, no longer human and less than animal, a thing that knows nothing but pain and drags itself through its span of years in the agony of unthinking self-destruction.

“No, you do not have to think; it is an act of moral choice. But someone had to think to keep you alive; if you choose to default, you default on existence and you pass the deficit to some moral man, expecting him to sacrifice his good for the sake of letting you survive by your evil.

“No, you do not have to be a man; but today those who are, are not there any longer. I have removed your means of survival—your victims.

“If you wish to know how I have done it and what I told them to make them

quit, you are hearing it now. I told them, in essence, the statement I am making tonight. They were men who had lived by my code, but had not known how great a virtue it represented. I made them see it. I brought them, not a re-evaluation, but only an identification of their values.

“We, the men of the mind, are now on strike against you in the name of a single axiom, which is the root of our moral code, just as the root of yours is the wish to escape it: the axiom that *existence exists*.

“Existence exists—and the act of grasping that statement implies two corollary axioms: that something exists which one perceives and that one exists possessing consciousness, consciousness being the faculty of perceiving that which exists.

“If nothing exists, there can be no consciousness: a consciousness with nothing to be conscious of is a contradiction in terms. A consciousness conscious of nothing but itself is a contradiction in terms: before it could identify itself as consciousness, it had to be conscious of something. If that which you claim to perceive does not exist, what you possess is not consciousness.

“Whatever the degree of your knowledge, these two—existence and consciousness—are axioms you cannot escape, these two are the irreducible primaries implied in any action you undertake, in any part of your knowledge and in its sum, from the first ray of light you perceive at the start of your life to the widest erudition you might acquire at its end. Whether you know the shape of a pebble or the structure of a solar system, the axioms remain the same: that *it exists* and that you *know* it.

“To exist is to be something, as distinguished from the nothing of non-existence, it is to be an entity of a specific nature made of specific attributes. Centuries ago, the man who was—no matter what his errors—the greatest of your philosophers, has stated the formula defining the concept of existence and the rule of all knowledge: *A is A*. A thing is itself. You have never grasped the meaning of his statement. I am here to complete it: Existence is Identity, Consciousness is Identification.

“Whatever you choose to consider, be it an object, an attribute or an action, the law of identity remains the same. A leaf cannot be a stone at the same time, it cannot be all red and all green at the same time, it cannot freeze and burn at the same time. *A is A*. Or, if you wish it stated in simpler language: You cannot have your cake and eat it, too.

“Are you seeking to know what is wrong with the world? All the disasters that have wrecked your world, came from your leaders’ attempt to evade the fact that *A is A*. All the secret evil you dread to face within you and all the pain you have ever endured, came from your own attempt to evade the fact that *A is A*. The

purpose of those who taught you to evade it, was to make you forget that Man is Man.

“Man cannot survive except by gaining knowledge, and reason is his only means to gain it. Reason is the faculty that perceives, identifies and integrates the material provided by his senses. The task of his senses is to give him the evidence of existence, but the task of identifying it belongs to his reason, his senses tell him only that something is, but what it is must be learned by his mind.

“All thinking is a process of identification and integration. Man perceives a blob of color; by integrating the evidence of his sight and his touch, he learns to identify it as a solid object: he learns to identify the object as a table; he learns that the table is made of wood; he learns that the wood consists of cells, that the cells consist of molecules, that the molecules consist of atoms. All through this process, the work of his mind consists of answers to a single question: *What is it?* His means to establish the truth of his answers is logic, and logic rests on the axiom that existence exists. Logic is the art of *non-contradictory identification*. A contradiction cannot exist. An atom is itself, and so is the universe; neither can contradict its own identity; nor can a part contradict the whole. No concept man forms is valid unless he integrates it without contradiction into the total sum of his knowledge. To arrive at a contradiction is to confess an error in one’s thinking; to maintain a contradiction is to abdicate one’s mind and to evict oneself from the realm of reality.

“Reality is that which exists; the unreal does not exist; the unreal is merely that negation of existence which is the content of a human consciousness when it attempts to abandon reason. Truth is the recognition of reality; reason, man’s only means of knowledge, is his only standard of truth.

“The most depraved sentence you can now utter is to ask: *Whose* reason? The answer is: Yours. No matter how vast your knowledge or how modest, it is your own mind that has to acquire it. It is only with your own knowledge that you can deal. It is only your own knowledge that you can claim to possess or ask others to consider. Your mind is your only judge of truth—and if others dissent from your verdict, reality is the court of final appeal. Nothing but a man’s mind can perform that complex, delicate, crucial process of identification which is thinking. Nothing can direct the process but his own judgment. Nothing can direct his judgment but his moral integrity.

“You who speak of a ‘moral instinct’ as if it were some separate endowment opposed to reason—man’s reason is his moral faculty. A process of reason is a process of constant choice in answer to the question: True or False?—*Right or Wrong?* Is a seed to be planted in soil in order to grow—right or wrong? Is a man’s wound to be disinfected in order to save his life—right or wrong? Does

the nature of atmospheric electricity permit it to be converted into kinetic power—right or wrong? It is the answers to such questions that gave you everything you have—and the answers came from a man's mind, a mind of intransigent devotion to that which is right.

“A rational process is a *moral* process. You may make an error at any step of it, with nothing to protect you but your own severity, or you may try to cheat, to fake the evidence and evade the effort of the quest—but if devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking.

“That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call ‘free will’ is your mind's freedom to think or not, the only will you have, your only freedom, the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life and your character.

“Thinking is man's only basic virtue, from which all the others proceed. And his basic vice, the source of all his evils, is that nameless act which all of you practice, but struggle never to admit: the act of blanking out, the willful suspension of one's consciousness, the refusal to think—not blindness, but the refusal to see; not ignorance, but the refusal to know. It is the act of unfocusing your mind and inducing an inner fog to escape the responsibility of judgment—on the unstated premise that a thing will not exist if only you refuse to identify it, that A will not be A so long as you do not pronounce the verdict ‘It is.’ Non-thinking is an act of annihilation, a wish to negate existence, an attempt to wipe out reality. But existence exists; reality is not to be wiped out, it will merely wipe out the wiper. By refusing to say ‘It is,’ you are refusing to say ‘I am.’ By suspending your judgment, you are negating your person. When a man declares: ‘Who am I to know?’—he is declaring: ‘Who am I to live?’

“This, in every hour and every issue, is your basic moral choice: thinking or non-thinking, existence or non-existence, A or non-A, entity or zero.

“To the extent to which a man is rational, life is the premise directing his actions. To the extent to which he is irrational, the premise directing his actions is death.

“You who prattle that morality is social and that man would need no morality on a desert island—it is on a desert island that he would need it most. Let him try to claim, when there are no victims to pay for it, that a rock is a house, that sand is clothing, that food will drop into his mouth without cause or effort, that he will collect a harvest tomorrow by devouring his stock seed today—and reality will wipe him out, as he deserves; reality will show him that life is a value to be bought and that thinking is the only coin noble enough to buy it.

“If I were to speak your kind of language, I would say that man's only moral

commandment is: Thou shalt think. But a .‘moral commandment’ is a contradiction in terms. The moral is the chosen, not the forced; the understood, not the obeyed. The moral is the rational, and reason accepts no commandments.

“My morality, the morality of reason, is contained in a single axiom: existence exists—and in a single choice: to live. The rest proceeds from these. To live, man must hold three things as the supreme and ruling values of his life: Reason-Purpose-Self-esteem. Reason, as his only tool of knowledge—Purpose, as his choice of the happiness which that tool must proceed to achieve-Self-esteem, as his inviolate certainty that his mind is competent to think and his person is worthy of happiness, which means: is worthy of living. These three values imply and require all of man’s virtues, and all his virtues pertain to the relation of existence and consciousness: rationality, independence, integrity, honesty, justice, productiveness, pride.

“Rationality is the recognition of the fact that existence exists, that nothing can alter the truth and nothing can take precedence over that act of perceiving it, which is thinking—that the mind is one’s only judge of values and one’s only guide of action—that reason is an absolute that permits no compromise—that a concession to the irrational invalidates one’s consciousness and turns it from the task of perceiving to the task of faking reality—that the alleged short-cut to knowledge, which is faith, is only a short-circuit destroying the mind—that the acceptance of a mystical invention is a wish for the annihilation of existence and, properly, annihilates one’s consciousness.

“Independence is the recognition of the fact that yours is the responsibility of judgment and nothing can help you escape it—that no substitute can do your thinking, as no pinch-hitter can live your life—that the vilest form of self-abasement and self-destruction is the subordination of your mind to the mind of another, the acceptance of an authority over your brain, the acceptance of his assertions as facts, his say-so as truth, his edicts as middle-man between your consciousness and your existence.

“Integrity is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake your consciousness, just as honesty is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake existence—that man is an indivisible entity, an integrated unit of two attributes: of matter and consciousness, and that he may permit no breach between body and mind, between action and thought, between his life and his convictions—that, like a judge impervious to public opinion, he may not sacrifice his convictions to the wishes of others, be it the whole of mankind shouting pleas or threats against him—that courage and confidence are practical necessities, that courage is the practical form of being true to existence, of being true to truth, and confidence is the practical form of being true to one’s own consciousness.

“Honesty is the recognition of the fact that the unreal is unreal and can have no value, that neither love nor fame nor cash is a value if obtained by fraud—that an attempt to gain a value by deceiving the mind of others is an act of raising your victims to a position higher than reality, where you become a pawn of their blindness, a slave of their non-thinking and their evasions, while their intelligence, their rationality, their perceptiveness become the enemies you have to dread and flee—that you do not care to live as a dependent, least of all a dependent on the stupidity of others, or as a fool whose source of values is the fools he succeeds in fooling—that honesty is not a social duty, not a sacrifice for the sake of others, but the most profoundly selfish virtue man can practice: his refusal to sacrifice the reality of his own existence to the deluded consciousness of others.

“Justice is the recognition of the fact that you cannot fake the character of men as you cannot fake the character of nature, that you must judge all men as conscientiously as you judge inanimate objects, with the same respect for truth, with the same incorruptible vision, by as pure and as *rational* a process of identification—that every man must be judged for what he is and treated accordingly, that just as you do not pay a higher price for a rusty chunk of scrap than for a piece of shining metal, so you do not value a rotter above a hero—that your moral appraisal is the coin paying men for their virtues or vices, and this payment demands of you as scrupulous an honor as you bring to financial transactions—that to withhold your contempt from men’s vices is an act of moral counterfeiting, and to withhold your admiration from their virtues is an act of moral embezzlement—that to place any other concern higher than justice is to devalue your moral currency and defraud the good in favor of the evil, since only the good can lose by a default of justice and only the evil can profit—and that the bottom of the pit at the end of that road, the act of moral bankruptcy, is to punish men for their virtues and reward them for their vices, that that is the collapse to full depravity, the Black Mass of the worship of death, the dedication of your consciousness to the destruction of existence.

“Productiveness is your acceptance of morality, your recognition of the fact that you choose to live—that productive work is the process by which man’s consciousness controls his existence, a constant process of acquiring knowledge and shaping matter to fit one’s purpose, of translating an idea into physical form, of remaking the earth in the image of one’s values—that *all* work is creative work if done by a thinking mind, and no work is creative if done by a blank who repeats in uncritical stupor a routine he has learned from others—that your work is yours to choose, and the choice is as wide as your mind, that nothing more is possible to you and nothing less is human—that to cheat your way into a job

bigger than your mind can handle is to become a fear-corroded ape on borrowed motions and borrowed time, and to settle down into a job that requires less than your mind's full capacity is to cut your motor and sentence yourself to another kind of motion: decay—that your work is the process of achieving your values, and to lose your ambition for values is to lose your ambition to live—that your body is a machine, but your mind is its driver, and you must drive as far as your mind will take you, with achievement as the goal of your road—that the man who has no purpose is a machine that coasts downhill at the mercy of any boulder to crash in the first chance ditch, that the man who stifles his mind is a stalled machine slowly going to rust, that the man who lets a leader prescribe his course is a wreck being towed to the scrap heap, and the man who makes another man his goal is a hitchhiker no driver should ever pick up—that your work is the purpose of your life, and you must speed past any killer who assumes the right to stop you, that any value you might find outside your work, any other loyalty or love, can be only travelers you choose to share your journey and must be travelers going on their own power in the same direction.

“Pride is the recognition of the fact that you are your own highest value and, like all of man's values, it has to be earned—that of any achievements open to you, the one that makes all others possible is the creation of your own character—that your character, your actions, your desires, your emotions are the products of the premises held by your mind—that as man must produce the physical values he needs to sustain his life, so he must acquire the values of character that make his life worth sustaining—that as man is a being of self-made wealth, so he is a being of self-made soul—that to live requires a sense of self-value, but man, who has no automatic values, has no automatic sense of self-esteem and must earn it by shaping his soul in the image of his moral ideal, in the image of Man, the rational being he is born able to create, but must create by choice—that the first precondition of self-esteem is that radiant selfishness of soul which desires the best in all things, in values of matter and spirit, a soul that seeks above all else to achieve its own moral perfection, valuing nothing higher than itself—and that the proof of an achieved self-esteem is your soul's shudder of contempt and rebellion against the role of a sacrificial animal, against the vile impertinence of any creed that proposes to immolate the irreplaceable value which is your consciousness and the incomparable glory which is your existence to the blind evasions and the stagnant decay of others.

“Are you beginning to see who is John Gait? I am the man who has earned the thing you did not fight for, the thing you have renounced, betrayed, corrupted, yet were unable fully to destroy and are now hiding as your guilty secret, spending your life in apologies to every professional cannibal, lest it be

discovered that somewhere within you, you still long to say what I am now saying to the hearing of the whole of mankind: I am proud of my own value and of the fact that I wish to live.

“This wish—which you share, yet submerge as an evil—is the only remnant of the good within you, but it is a wish one must learn to deserve. His own happiness is man’s only moral purpose, but only his own virtue can achieve it. Virtue is not an end in itself. Virtue is not its own reward or sacrificial fodder for the reward of evil. *Life* is the reward of virtue—and happiness is the goal and the reward of life.

“Just as your body has two fundamental sensations, pleasure and pain, as signs of its welfare or injury, as a barometer of its basic alternative, life or death, so your consciousness has two fundamental emotions, joy and suffering, in answer to the same alternative. Your emotions are estimates of that which furthers your life or threatens it, lightning calculators giving you a sum of your profit or loss. You have no choice about your capacity to feel that something is good for you or evil, but *what* you will consider good or evil, what will give you joy or pain, what you will love or hate, desire or fear, depends on your standard of value. Emotions are inherent in your nature, but their content is dictated by your mind. Your emotional capacity is an empty motor, and your values are the fuel with which your mind fills it. If you choose a mix of contradictions, it will clog your motor, corrode your transmission and wreck you on your first attempt to move with a machine which you, the driver, have corrupted.

“If you hold the irrational as your standard of value and the impossible as your concept of the good, if you long for rewards you have not earned, for a fortune or a love you don’t deserve, for a loophole in the law of causality, for an A that becomes non-A at your whim, if you desire the opposite of existence—you will reach it. Do not cry, when you reach it, that life is frustration and that happiness is impossible to man; check your fuel: it brought you where you wanted to go.

“Happiness is not to be achieved at the command of emotional whims. Happiness is not the satisfaction of whatever irrational wishes you might blindly attempt to indulge. Happiness is a state of non-contradictory joy—a joy without penalty or guilt, a joy that does not clash with any of your values and does not work for your own destruction, not the joy of escaping from your mind, but of using your mind’s fullest power, not the joy of faking reality, but of achieving values that are real, not the joy of a drunkard, but of a producer. Happiness is possible only to a rational man, the man who desires nothing but rational goals, seeks nothing but rational values and finds his joy in nothing but rational actions.

“Just as I support my life, neither by robbery nor alms, but by my own effort, so I do not seek to derive my happiness from the injury or the favor of others,

but earn it by my own achievement. Just as I do not consider the pleasure of others as the goal of my life, so I do not consider my pleasure as the goal of the lives of others. Just as there are no contradictions in my values and no conflicts among my desires—so there are no victims and no conflicts of interest among rational men, men who do not desire the unearned and do not view one another with a cannibal's lust, men who neither make sacrifices nor accept them.

“The symbol of all relationships among such men, the moral symbol of respect for human beings, is *the trader*. We, who live by values, not by loot, are traders, both in matter and in spirit. A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. A trader does not ask to be paid for his failures, nor does he ask to be loved for his flaws. A trader does not squander his body as fodder or his soul as alms. Just as he does not give his work except in trade for material values, so he does not give the values of his spirit—his love, his friendship, his esteem—except in payment and in trade for human virtues, in payment for his own selfish pleasure, which he receives from men he can respect. The mystic parasites who have, throughout the ages, reviled the traders and held them in contempt, while honoring the beggars and the looters, have known the secret motive of their sneers: a trader is the entity they dread—a man of justice.

“Do you ask what moral obligation I owe to my fellow men? None—except the obligation I owe to myself, to material objects and to all of existence: rationality. I deal with men as my nature and theirs demands: by means of reason. I seek or desire nothing from them except such relations as they care to enter of their own voluntary choice. It is only with their mind that I can deal and only for my own self-interest, when they see that my interest coincides with theirs. When they don't, I enter no relationship; I let dissenters go their way and I do not swerve from mine. I win by means of nothing but logic and I surrender to nothing but logic. I do not surrender my reason or deal with men who surrender theirs. I have nothing to gain from fools or cowards; I have no benefits to seek from human vices: from stupidity, dishonesty or fear. The only value men can offer me is the work of their mind. When I disagree with a rational man, I let reality be our final arbiter; if I am right, he will learn; if I am wrong, I will; one of us will win, but both will profit.

“Whatever may be open to disagreement, there is one act of evil that may not, the act that no man may commit against others and no man may sanction or forgive. So long as men desire to live together, no man may *initiate*—do you hear me? no man may *start*—the use of physical force against others.

“To interpose the threat of physical destruction between a man and his perception of reality, is to negate and paralyze his means of survival; to force

him to act against his own judgment, is like forcing him to act against his own sight. Whoever, to whatever purpose or extent, initiates the use of force, is a killer acting on the premise of death in a manner wider than murder: the premise of destroying man's capacity to live.

"Do not open your mouth to tell me that your mind has convinced you of your right to force my mind. Force and mind are opposites; morality ends where a gun begins. When you declare that men are irrational animals and propose to treat them as such, you define thereby your own character and can no longer claim the sanction of reason—as no advocate of contradictions can claim it. There can be no 'right' to destroy the source of rights, the only means of judging right and wrong: the mind.

"To force a man to drop his own mind and to accept your will as a substitute, with a gun in place of a syllogism, with terror in place of proof, and death as the final argument—is to attempt to exist in defiance of reality. Reality demands of man that he act for his own rational interest; your gun demands of him that he act against it. Reality threatens man with death if he does not act on his rational judgment; you threaten him with death if he does. You place him into a world where the price of his life is the surrender of all the virtues required by life—and death by a process of gradual destruction is all that you and your system will achieve, when death is made to be the ruling power, the winning argument in a society of men.

"Be it a highwayman who confronts a traveler with the ultimatum: 'Your money or your life,' or a politician who confronts a country with the ultimatum: 'Your children's education or your life,' the meaning of that ultimatum is: 'Your mind or your life'.—and neither is possible to man without the other.

"If there are degrees of evil, it is hard to say who is the more contemptible: the brute who assumes the right to force the mind of others or the moral degenerate who grants to others the right to force his mind. *That* is the moral absolute one does not leave open to debate. I do not grant the terms of reason to men who propose to deprive me of reason. I do not enter discussions with neighbors who think they can forbid me to think. I do not place my moral sanction upon a murderer's wish to kill me. When a man attempts to deal with me by force, I answer him—by force.

"It is only as retaliation that force may be used and only against the man who starts its use. No, I do not share his evil or sink to his concept of morality: I merely grant him his choice, destruction, the only destruction he had the right to choose: his own. He uses force to seize a value; I use it only to destroy destruction. A holdup man seeks to gain wealth by killing me; I do not grow richer by killing a holdup man. I seek no values by means of evil, nor do I

surrender my values to evil.

“In the name of all the producers who had kept you alive and received your death ultimatums in payment, I now answer you with a single ultimatum of our own: Our work or your guns. You can choose either; you can’t have both. We do not initiate the use of force against others or submit to force at their hands. If you desire ever again to live in an industrial society, it will be on *our* moral terms. Our terms and our motive power are the antithesis of yours. You have been using fear as your weapon and have been bringing death to man as his punishment for rejecting your morality. We offer him life as his reward for accepting ours.

“You who are worshippers of the zero—you have never discovered that achieving life is not the equivalent of avoiding death. Joy is not ‘the absence of pain,’ intelligence is not ‘the absence of stupidity,’ light is not ‘the absence of darkness,’ an entity is not ‘the absence of a nonentity.’ Building is not done by abstaining from demolition; centuries of sitting and waiting in such abstinence will not raise one single girder for you to abstain from demolishing—and now you can no longer say to me, the builder: ‘Produce, and feed us in exchange for our not destroying your production.’ I am answering in the name of all your victims: Perish with and in your own void. Existence is not a negation of negatives. Evil, not value, is an absence and a negation, evil is impotent and has no power but that which we let it extort from us. Perish, because we have learned that a zero cannot hold a mortgage over life.

“You seek escape from pain. We seek the achievement of happiness. You exist for the sake of avoiding punishment. We exist for the sake of earning rewards. Threats will not make us function; fear is not our incentive. It is not death that we wish to avoid, but life that we wish to .live.

“You, who have lost the concept of the difference, you who claim that fear and joy are incentives of equal power—and secretly add that fear is the more ‘practical’.—you do not wish to live, and only fear of death still holds you to the existence you have damned. You dart in panic through the trap of your days, looking for the exit you have closed, running from a pursuer you dare not name to a terror you dare not acknowledge, and the greater your terror the greater your dread of the only act that could save you: thinking. The purpose of your struggle is not to know, not to grasp or name or hear the thing I shall now state to your hearing: that yours is the Morality of Death.

“Death is the standard of your values, death is your chosen goal, and you have to keep running, since there is no escape from the pursuer who is out to destroy you or from the knowledge that that pursuer is yourself. Stop running, for once—there is no place to run—stand naked, as you dread to stand, but as I see you,

and take a look at what you dared to call a moral code.

“Damnation is the start of your morality, destruction is its purpose, means and end. Your code begins by damning man as evil, then demands that he practice a good which it defines as impossible for him to practice. It demands, as his first proof of virtue, that he accept his own depravity without proof. It demands that he start, not with a standard of value, but with a standard of evil, which is himself, by means of which he is then to define the good: the good is that which he is not.

“It does not matter who then becomes the profiteer on his renounced glory and tormented soul, a mystic God with some incomprehensible design or any passer-by whose rotting sores are held as some inexplicable claim upon him—it does not matter, the good is not for him to understand, his duty is to crawl through years of penance, atoning for the guilt of his existence to any stray collector of unintelligible debts, his only concept of a value is a zero: the good is that which is non-man. .

“The name of this monstrous absurdity is Original Sin.

“A sin without volition is a slap at morality and an insolent contradiction in terms: that which is outside the possibility of choice is outside the province of morality. If man is evil by birth, he has no will, no power to change it; if he has no will, he can be neither good nor evil; a robot is amoral. To hold, as man’s sin, a fact not open to his choice is a mockery of morality. To hold man’s nature as his sin is a mockery of nature. To punish him for a crime he committed before he was born is a mockery of justice. To hold him guilty in a matter where no innocence exists is a mockery of reason. To destroy morality, nature, justice and reason by means of a single concept is a feat of evil hardly to be matched. Yet *that* is the root of your code.

“Do not hide behind the cowardly evasion that man is born with free will, but with a .‘tendency’ to evil. A free will saddled with a tendency is like a game with loaded dice. It forces man to struggle through the effort of playing, to bear responsibility and pay for the game, but the decision is weighted in favor of a tendency that he had no power to escape. If the tendency is of his choice, he cannot possess it at birth; if it is not of his choice, his will is not free.

“What is the nature of the guilt that your teachers call his Original Sin? What are the evils man acquired when he fell from a state they consider perfection? Their myth declares that he ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge—he acquired a mind and became a rational being. It was the knowledge of good and evil—he became a moral being. He was sentenced to earn his bread by his labor—he became a productive being. He was sentenced to experience desire—he acquired the capacity of sexual enjoyment. The evils for which they damn him are reason,

morality, creativeness, joy—all the cardinal values of his existence. It is not his vices that their myth of man's fall is designed to explain and condemn, it is not his errors that they hold as his guilt, but the essence of his nature as man. Whatever he was—that robot in the Garden of Eden, who existed without mind, without values, without labor, without love—he was not man.

“Man's fall, according to your teachers, was that he gained the virtues required to live. These virtues, by their standard, are his Sin. His evil, they charge, is that he's man. His guilt, they charge, is that he lives.

“They call it a morality of mercy and a doctrine of love for man.

“No, they say, they do not preach that man is evil, the evil is only that alien object: his body. No, they say, they do not wish to kill him, they only wish to make him lose his body. They seek to help him, they say, against his pain—and they point at the torture rack to which they've tied him, the rack with two wheels that pull him in opposite directions, the rack of the doctrine that splits his soul and body.

“They have cut man in two, setting one half against the other. They have taught him that his body and his consciousness are two enemies engaged in deadly conflict, two antagonists of opposite natures, contradictory claims, incompatible needs, that to benefit one is to injure the other, that his soul belongs to a supernatural realm, but his body is an evil prison holding it in bondage to this earth—and that the good is to defeat his body, to undermine it by years of patient struggle, digging his way to that glorious jail-break which leads into the freedom of the grave.

“They have taught man that he is a hopeless misfit made of two elements, both symbols of death. A body without a soul is a corpse, a soul without a body is a ghost—yet such is their image of man's nature: the battleground of a struggle between a corpse and a ghost, a corpse endowed with some evil volition of its own and a ghost endowed with the knowledge that everything known to man is non-existent, that only the unknowable exists.

“Do you observe what human faculty that doctrine was designed to ignore? It was man's mind that had to be negated in order to make him fall apart. Once he surrendered reason, he was left at the mercy of two monsters whom he could not fathom or control: of a body moved by unaccountable instincts and of a soul moved by mystic revelations—he was left as the passively ravaged victim of a battle between a robot and a dictaphone.

“And as he now crawls through the wreckage, groping blindly for a way to live, your teachers offer him the help of a morality that proclaims that he'll find no solution and must seek no fulfillment on earth. Real existence, they tell him, is that which he cannot perceive, true consciousness is the faculty of perceiving

the non-existent—and if he is unable to understand it, *that* is the proof that his existence is evil and his consciousness impotent.

“As products of the split between man’s soul and body, there are two kinds of teachers of the Morality of Death: the mystics of spirit and the mystics of muscle, whom you call the spiritualists and the materialists, those who believe in consciousness without existence and those who believe in existence without consciousness. Both demand the surrender of your mind, one to their revelations, the other to their reflexes. No matter how loudly they posture in the roles of irreconcilable antagonists, their moral codes are alike, and so are their aims: in matter—the enslavement of man’s body, in spirit—the destruction of his mind.

“The good, say the mystics of spirit, is God, a being whose only definition is that he is beyond man’s power to conceive—a definition that invalidates man’s consciousness and nullifies his concepts of existence. The good, say the mystics of muscle, is Society—a thing which they define as an organism that possesses no physical form, a super-being embodied in no one in particular and everyone in general except yourself. Man’s mind, say the mystics of spirit, must be subordinated to the will of God. Man’s mind, say the mystics of muscle, must be subordinated to the will of Society. Man’s standard of value, say the mystics of spirit, is the pleasure of God, whose standards are beyond man’s power of comprehension and must be accepted on faith. Man’s standard of value, say the mystics of muscle, is the pleasure of Society, whose standards are beyond man’s right of judgment and must be obeyed as a primary absolute. The purpose of man’s life, say both, is to become an abject zombie who serves a purpose he does not know, for reasons he is not to question. His reward, say the mystics of spirit, will be given to him beyond the grave. His reward, say the mystics of muscle, will be given on earth—to his great-grandchildren.

“*Selfishness*—say both—is man’s evil. Man’s good—say both—is to give up his personal desires, to deny himself, renounce himself, surrender; man’s good is to negate the life he lives. *Sacrifice*—cry both—is the essence of morality, the highest virtue within man’s reach.

“Whoever is now within reach of my voice, whoever is man the victim, not man the killer, I am speaking at the deathbed of your mind, at the brink of that darkness in which you’re drowning, and if there still remains within you the power to struggle to hold on to those fading sparks which had been yourself—use it now. The word that has destroyed you is ‘*sacrifice*.’ Use the last of your strength to understand its meaning. You’re still alive. You have a chance.

“‘Sacrifice’ does not mean the rejection of the worthless, but of the precious. ‘Sacrifice’ does not mean the rejection of the evil for the sake of the good, but of the good for the sake of the evil. ‘Sacrifice’ is the surrender of that which you

value in favor of that which you don't.

"If you exchange a penny for a dollar, it is not a sacrifice; if you exchange a dollar for a penny, it is. If you achieve the career you wanted, after years of struggle, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you then renounce it for the sake of a rival, it *is*. If you own a bottle of milk and give it to your starving child, it is not a sacrifice; if you give it to your neighbor's child and let your own die, it is.

"If you give money to help a friend, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give it to a worthless stranger, it is. If you give your friend a sum you can afford, it is *not* a sacrifice; if you give him money at the cost of your own discomfort, it is only a partial virtue, according to this sort of moral standard; if you give him money at the cost of disaster to yourself—*that* is the virtue of sacrifice in full.

"If you renounce all personal desires and dedicate your life to those you love, you do not achieve full virtue: you still retain a value of your own, which is your love. If you devote your life to random strangers, it is an act of greater virtue. If you devote your life to serving men you hate—*that* is the greatest of the virtues you can practice.

"A sacrifice is the surrender of a value. Full sacrifice is full surrender of all values. If you wish to achieve full virtue, you must seek no gratitude in return for your sacrifice, no praise, no love, no admiration, no self-esteem, not even the pride of being virtuous; the faintest trace of any gain dilutes your virtue. If you pursue a course of action that does not taint your life by any joy, that brings you no value in matter, no value in spirit, no gain, no profit, no reward—if you achieve this state of total zero, you have achieved the ideal of moral perfection.

"You are told that moral perfection is impossible to man—and, by this standard, it is. You cannot achieve it so long as you live, but the value of your life and of your person is gauged by how closely you succeed in approaching that ideal zero which is *death*.

"If you start, however, as a passionless blank, as a vegetable seeking to be eaten, with no values to reject and no wishes to renounce, you will not win the crown of sacrifice. It is not a sacrifice to renounce the unwanted. It is not a sacrifice to give your life for others, if death is your personal desire. To achieve the virtue of sacrifice, you must want to live, you must love it, you must burn with passion for this earth and for all the splendor it can give you—you must feel the twist of every knife as it slashes your desires away from your reach and drains your love out of your body. It is not mere death that the morality of sacrifice holds out to you as an ideal, but death by slow torture.

"Do not remind me that it pertains only to this life on earth. I am concerned with no other. Neither are you.

"If you wish to save the last of your dignity, do not call your best actions a

‘sacrifice’: that term brands you as immoral. If a mother buys food for her hungry child rather than a hat for herself, it is not a sacrifice: she values the child higher than the hat; but it is a sacrifice to the kind of mother whose higher value is the hat, who would prefer her child to starve and feeds him only from a sense of duty. If a man dies fighting for his own freedom, it is *not* a sacrifice: he is not willing to live as a slave; but it is a sacrifice to the kind of man who’s willing. If a man refuses to sell his convictions, it is *not* a sacrifice, unless he is the sort of man who has no convictions.

“Sacrifice could be proper only for those who have nothing to sacrifice—no values, no standards, no judgment—those whose desires are irrational whims, blindly conceived and lightly surrendered. For a man of moral stature, whose desires are born of rational values, sacrifice is the surrender of the right to the wrong, of the good to the evil.

“The creed of sacrifice is a morality for the immoral—a morality that declares its own bankruptcy by confessing that it can’t impart to men any personal stake in virtues or values, and that their souls are sewers of depravity, which they must be taught to sacrifice. By its own confession, it is impotent to teach men to be good and can only subject them to constant punishment.

“Are you thinking, in some foggy stupor, that it’s only *material* values that your morality requires you to sacrifice? And *what* do you think are material values? Matter has no value except as a means for the satisfaction of human desires. Matter is only a tool of human values. To what service are you asked to give the material tools your virtue has produced? To the service of that which you regard as evil: to a principle you do not share, to a person you do not respect, to the achievement of a purpose opposed to your own—else your gift is *not* a sacrifice.

“Your morality tells you to renounce the material world and to divorce your values from matter. A man whose values are given no expression in material form, whose existence is unrelated to his ideals, whose actions contradict his convictions, is a cheap little hypocrite—yet *that* is the man who obeys your morality and divorces his values from matter. The man who loves one woman, but sleeps with another—the man who admires the talent of a worker, but hires another—the man who considers one cause to be just, but donates his money to the support of another—the man who holds high standards of craftsmanship, but devotes his effort to the production of trash—*these* are the men who have renounced matter, the men who believe that the values of their spirit cannot be brought into material reality.

“Do you say it is the spirit that such men have renounced? Yes, of course. You cannot have one without the other. You are an indivisible entity of matter

and consciousness. Renounce your consciousness and you become a brute. Renounce your body and you become a fake. Renounce the material world and you surrender it to evil.

“And *that* is precisely the goal of your morality, the duty that your code demands of you. Give to that which you do not enjoy, serve that which you do not admire, submit to that which you consider evil—surrender the world to the values of others, deny, reject, renounce your *self*. Your self is your *mind*; renounce it and you become a chunk of meat ready for any cannibal to swallow.

“It is your *mind* that they want you to surrender—all those who preach the creed of sacrifice, whatever their tags or their motives, whether they demand it for the sake of your soul or of your body, whether they promise you another life in heaven or a full stomach on this earth. Those who start by saying: ‘It is selfish to pursue your own wishes, you must sacrifice them to the wishes of others’.—end up by saying: ‘It is selfish to uphold your convictions, you must sacrifice them to the convictions of others.’

“This much is true: the most *selfish* of all things is the independent mind that recognizes no authority higher than its own and no value higher than its judgment of truth. You are asked to sacrifice your intellectual integrity, your logic, your reason, your standard of truth—in favor of becoming a prostitute whose standard is the greatest good for the greatest number.

“If you search your code for guidance, for an answer to the question: ‘What is the good?’—the only answer you will find is ‘*The good of others.*’ The good is whatever others wish, whatever you feel they feel they wish, or whatever you feel they ought to feel. ‘The good of others’ is a magic formula that transforms anything into gold, a formula to be recited as a guarantee of moral glory and as a fumigator for any action, even the slaughter of a continent. Your standard of virtue is not an object, not an act, not a principle, but an *intention*. You need no proof, no reasons, no success, you need not achieve in fact the good of others -all you need to know is that your motive was the good of others, *not* your own. Your only definition of the good is a negation: the good is the ‘.non-good for me..’.

“Your code—which boasts that it upholds eternal, absolute, objective moral values and scorns the conditional, the relative and the subjective -your code hands out, as its version of the absolute, the following rule of moral conduct: If *you* wish it, it’s evil; if others wish it, it’s good; if the motive of your action is *your* welfare, don’t do it; if the motive is the welfare of others, then anything goes.

“As this double-jointed, double-standard morality splits you in half, so it splits mankind into two enemy camps: one is you, the other is all the rest of humanity.

You are the only outcast who has no right to wish or live. *You* are the only servant, the rest are the masters, *you* are the only giver, the rest are the takers, *you* are the eternal debtor, the rest are the creditors never to be paid off. You must not question their right to your sacrifice, or the nature of their wishes and their needs: their right is conferred upon them by a negative, by the fact that they are ‘non-you.’

“For those of you who might ask questions, your code provides a consolation prize and booby-trap: it is for your own happiness, it says, that you must serve the happiness of others, the only way to achieve your joy is to give it up to others, the only way to achieve your prosperity is to surrender your wealth to others, the only way to protect your life is to protect all men except yourself—and if you find no joy in this procedure, it is your own fault and the proof of your evil; if you were good, you would find your happiness in providing a banquet for others, and your dignity in existing on such crumbs as *they* might care to toss you.

“You who have no standard of self-esteem, accept the guilt and dare not ask the questions. But you know the unadmitted answer, refusing to acknowledge what you see, what hidden premise moves your world. You know it, not in honest statement, but as a dark uneasiness within you, while you flounder between guiltily cheating and grudgingly practicing a principle too vicious to name.

“I, who do not accept the unearned, neither in values nor in guilt, am here to ask the questions you evaded. Why is it moral to serve the happiness of others, but not your own? If enjoyment is a value, why is it moral when experienced by others, but immoral when experienced by you? If the sensation of eating a cake is a value, why is it an immoral indulgence in your stomach, but a moral goal for you to achieve in the stomach of others? Why is it immoral for you to desire, but moral for others to do so? Why is it immoral to produce a value and keep it, but moral to give it away? And if it is not moral for you to keep a value, why is it moral for others to accept it? If you are selfless and virtuous when you give it, are they not selfish and vicious when they take it? Does virtue consist of serving vice? Is the moral purpose of those who are good, self-immolation for the sake of those who are evil?

“The answer you evade, the monstrous answer is: No, the takers are not evil, provided they did not *earn* the value you gave them. It is not immoral for them to accept it, provided they are unable to produce it, unable to deserve it, unable to give you any value in return. It is not immoral for them to enjoy it, provided they do not obtain it by right.

“Such is the secret core of your creed, the other half of your double standard:

it is immoral to live by your own effort, but moral to live by the effort of others—it is immoral to consume your own product, but moral to consume the products of others—it is immoral to earn, but moral to mooch—it is the parasites who are the moral justification for the existence of the producers, but the existence of the parasites is an end in itself—it is evil to profit by achievement, but good to profit by sacrifice—it is evil to create your own happiness, but good to enjoy it at the price of the blood of others.

“Your code divides mankind into two castes and commands them to live by opposite rules: those who may desire anything and those who may desire nothing, the chosen and the damned, the riders and the carriers, the eaters and the eaten. What standard determines your caste? What passkey admits you to the moral elite? The passkey is *lack of value*.

“Whatever the value involved, it is your lack of it that gives you a claim upon those who don’t lack it. It is your *need* that gives you a claim to rewards. If you are able to satisfy your need, your ability annuls your right to satisfy it. But a need you are *unable* to satisfy gives you first right to the lives of mankind.

“If you succeed, any man who fails is your master; if you fail, any man who succeeds is your serf. Whether your failure is just or not, whether your wishes are rational or not, whether your misfortune is undeserved or the result of your vices, it is *misfortune* that gives you a right to rewards. It is *pain*, regardless of its nature or cause, pain as a primary absolute, that gives you a mortgage on all of existence.

“If you heal your pain by your own effort, you receive no moral credit: your code regards it scornfully as an act of self-interest. Whatever value you seek to acquire, be it wealth or food or love or rights, if you acquire it by means of your virtue, your code does not regard it as a moral acquisition: you occasion no loss to anyone, it is a trade, not alms; a payment, not a sacrifice. The *deserved* belongs in the selfish, commercial realm of mutual profit; it is only the *undeserved* that calls for that moral transaction which consists of profit to one at the price of disaster to the other. To demand rewards for your virtue is selfish and immoral; it is your *lack of virtue* that transforms your demand into a moral right.

“A morality that holds *need* as a claim, holds emptiness—non-existence—as its standard of value; it rewards an *absence*, a defect: weakness, inability, incompetence, suffering, disease, disaster, the lack, the fault, the flaw—the zero.

“Who provides the account to pay these claims? Those who are cursed for being non-zeros, each to the extent of his distance from that ideal. Since all values are the product of virtues, the degree of your virtue is used as the measure of your penalty; the degree of your faults is used as the measure of your gain.

Your code declares that the rational man must sacrifice himself to the irrational, the independent man to parasites, the honest man to the dishonest, the man of justice to the unjust, the productive man to thieving loafers, the man of integrity to compromising knaves, the man of self-esteem to sniveling neurotics. Do you wonder at the meanness of soul in those you see around you? The man who achieves these virtues will not accept your moral code; the man who accepts your moral code will not achieve these virtues.

“Under a morality of sacrifice, the first value you sacrifice is morality; the next is self-esteem. When need is the standard, every man is both victim and parasite. As a victim, he must labor to fill the needs of others, leaving himself in the position of a parasite whose needs must be filled by others. He cannot approach his fellow men except in one of two disgraceful roles: he is both a beggar and a sucker.

“You fear the man who has a dollar less than you, that dollar is rightfully his, he makes you feel like a moral defrauder. You hate the man who has a dollar more than you, that dollar is rightfully yours, he makes you feel that you are morally defrauded. The man below is a source of your guilt, the man above is a source of your frustration. You do not know what to surrender or demand, when to give and when to grab, what pleasure in life is rightfully yours and what debt is still unpaid to others—you struggle to evade, as ‘theory,’ the knowledge that by the moral standard you’ve accepted you are guilty every moment of your life, there is no mouthful of food you swallow that is not *needed* by someone somewhere on earth—and you give up the problem in blind resentment, you conclude that moral perfection is not to be achieved or *desired*, that you will muddle through by snatching as snatch can and by avoiding the eyes of the young, of those who look at you as if self-esteem were possible and they expected you to have it. Guilt is all that you retain within your soul—and so does every other man, as he goes past, avoiding your eyes. Do you wonder why your morality has not achieved brotherhood on earth or the good will of man to man?

“The justification of sacrifice, that your morality propounds, is more corrupt than the corruption it purports to justify. The motive of your sacrifice, it tells you, should be *love*—the love you ought to feel for every man. A morality that professes the belief that the values of the spirit are more precious than matter, a morality that teaches you to scorn a whore who gives her body indiscriminately to all men—this same morality demands that you surrender your soul to promiscuous love for all comers.

“As there can be no causeless wealth, so there can be no causeless love or any sort of causeless emotion. An emotion is a response to a fact of reality, an estimate dictated by your standards. To love is to value. The man who tells you

that it is possible to value without values, to love those whom you appraise as worthless, is the man who tells you that it is possible to grow rich by consuming without producing and that paper money is as valuable as gold.

“Observe that he does not expect you to feel a causeless fear. When his kind get into power, they are expert at contriving means of terror, at giving you ample cause to feel the fear by which they desire to rule you. But when it comes to love, the highest of emotions, you permit them to shriek at you accusingly that you are a moral delinquent if you’re incapable of feeling causeless love. When a man feels fear without reason, you call him to the attention of a psychiatrist; you are not so careful to protect the meaning, the nature and the dignity of love.

“Love is the expression of one’s values, the greatest reward you can earn for the moral qualities you have achieved in your character and person, the emotional price paid by one man for the joy he receives from the virtues of another. Your morality demands that you divorce your love from values and hand it down to any vagrant, not as response to his worth, but as response to his *need*, not as reward, but as alms, not as a payment for virtues, but as a blank check on vices. Your morality tells you that the purpose of love is to set you free of the bonds of morality, that love is superior to moral judgment, that true love transcends, forgives and survives every manner of evil in its object, and the greater the love the greater the depravity it permits to the loved. To love a man for his virtues is paltry and human, it tells you; to love him for his flaws is divine. To love those who are worthy of it is self-interest; to love the unworthy is sacrifice. You owe your love to those who don’t deserve it, and the less they deserve it, the more love you owe them—the more loathsome the object, the nobler your love—the more unfastidious your love, the greater your virtue—and if you can bring your soul to the state of a dump heap that welcomes anything on equal terms, if you can cease to value moral values, you have achieved the state of moral perfection.

“Such is your morality of sacrifice and such are the twin ideals it offers: to refashion the life of your body in the image of a human stockyards, and the life of your spirit in the image of a dump.

“Such was your goal—and you’ve reached it. Why do you now moan complaints about man’s impotence and the futility of human aspirations ? Because you were unable to prosper by seeking destruction? Because you were unable to find joy by worshipping pain? Because you were unable to live by holding death as your standard of value?

“The degree of your ability to live was the degree to which you broke your moral code, yet you believe that those who preach it are friends of humanity, you damn yourself and dare not question their motives or their goals. Take a look at

them now, when you face your last choice—erish, do so with full knowledge of how cheaply how small an enemy has claimed your life.

“The mystics of both schools, who preach the creed of sacrifice, are germs that attack you through a single sore: your fear of relying on your mind. They tell you that they possess a means of knowledge higher than the mind, a mode of consciousness superior to reason—like a special pull with some bureaucrat of the universe who gives them secret tips withheld from others. The mystics of spirit declare that they possess an extra sense you lack: this special sixth sense consists of contradicting the whole of the knowledge of your five. The mystics of muscle do not bother to assert any claim to extrasensory perception: they merely declare that your senses are not valid, and that their wisdom consists of perceiving your blindness by some manner of unspecified means. Both kinds demand that you invalidate your own consciousness and surrender yourself into their power. They offer you, as proof of their superior knowledge, the fact that they assert the opposite of everything you know, and as proof of their superior ability to deal with existence, the fact that they lead you to misery, self-sacrifice, starvation, destruction.

“They claim that they perceive a mode of being superior to your existence on this earth. The mystics of spirit call it ‘another dimension,’ which consists of denying dimensions. The mystics of muscle call it ‘the future,’ which consists of denying the present. To exist is to possess identity. What identity are they able to give to their superior realm? They keep telling you what it is *not*, but never tell you what it *is*. All their identifications consist of negating: God is that which no human mind can know, they say—and proceed to demand that you consider it knowledge—God is non-man, heaven is non-earth, soul is non-body, virtue is non-profit, A is non-A, perception is non-sensory, knowledge is non-reason. Their definitions are not acts of defining, but of wiping out.

“It is only the metaphysics of a leech that would cling to the idea of a universe where a zero is a standard of identification. A leech would want to seek escape from the necessity to name its own nature—escape from the necessity to know that the substance on which it builds its private universe is blood.

“What is the nature of that superior world to which they sacrifice the world that exists? The mystics of spirit curse matter, the mystics of muscle curse profit. The first wish men to profit by renouncing the earth, the second wish men to inherit the earth by renouncing all profit. Their non-material, non-profit worlds are realms where rivers run with milk and coffee, where wine spurts from rocks at their command, where pastry drops on them from clouds at the price of opening their mouth. On this material, profit-chasing earth, an enormous investment of virtue—of intelligence, integrity, energy, skill—is required to

construct a railroad to carry them the distance of one mile; in their non-material, non-profit world, they travel from planet to planet at the cost of a wish. If an honest person asks them: 'How?'—they answer with righteous scorn that a 'how' is the concept of vulgar realists; the concept of superior spirits is 'Somehow..'. On this earth restricted by matter and profit, rewards are achieved by thought; in a world set free of such restrictions, rewards are achieved by wishing.

"And *that* is the whole of their shabby secret. The secret of all their esoteric philosophies, of all their dialectics and super-senses, of their evasive eyes and snarling words, the secret for which they destroy civilization, language, industries and lives, the secret for which they pierce their own eyes and eardrums, grind out their senses, blank out their minds, the purpose for which they dissolve the absolutes of reason, logic, matter, existence, reality—is to erect upon that plastic fog a single holy absolute: their Wish.

"The restriction they seek to escape is the law of identity. The freedom they seek is freedom from the fact that an A will remain an A, no matter what their tears or tantrums—that a river will not bring them milk, no matter what their hunger—that water will not run uphill, no matter what comforts they could gain if it did, and if they want to lift it to the roof of a skyscraper, they must do it by a process of thought and labor, in which the nature of an inch of pipe line counts, but their feelings do not—that their feelings are impotent to alter the course of a single speck of dust in space or the nature of any action they have committed.

"Those who tell you that man is unable to perceive a reality undistorted by his senses, mean that they are unwilling to perceive a reality undistorted by their feelings. 'Things as they are' are things as perceived by your mind; divorce them from reason and they become 'things as perceived by your wishes..'.

"There is no honest revolt against reason—and when you accept any part of their creed, your motive is to get away with something your reason would not permit you to attempt. The freedom you seek is freedom from the fact that if you stole your wealth, you are a scoundrel, no matter how much you give to charity or how many prayers you recite—that if you sleep with sluts, you're not a worthy husband, no matter how anxiously you feel that you love your wife next morning—that you are an entity, not a series of random pieces scattered through a universe where nothing sticks and nothing commits you to anything, the universe of a child's nightmare where identities switch and swim, where the rotter and the hero are interchangeable parts arbitrarily assumed at will—that you are a man—that you are an entity—that you *are*.

"No matter how eagerly you claim that the goal of your mystic wishing is a higher mode of life, the rebellion against identity is the wish for non-existence.

The desire not to be anything is the desire not .to be.

“Your teachers, the mystics of both schools, have reversed causality in their consciousness, then strive to reverse it in existence. They take their emotions as a cause, and their mind as a passive effect. They make their emotions their tool for perceiving reality. They hold their desires as an irreducible primary, as a fact superseding all facts. An honest man does not desire until he has identified the object of his desire. He says: ‘It is, therefore I want it.’ They say: ‘I want it, therefore .it is.’

“They want to cheat the axiom of existence and consciousness, they want their consciousness to be an instrument not of *perceiving* but of *creating* existence, and existence to be not the *object* but the *subject* of their consciousness—they want to be that God they created in their image and likeness, who creates a universe out of a void by means of an arbitrary whim. But reality is not to be cheated. What they achieve is the opposite of their desire. They want an omnipotent power over existence; instead, they lose the power of their consciousness. By refusing to know, they condemn themselves to the horror of a perpetual unknown.

“Those irrational wishes that draw you to their creed, those emotions you worship as an idol, on whose altar you sacrifice the earth, that dark, incoherent passion within you, which you take as the voice of God or of your glands, is nothing more than the corpse of your mind. An emotion that clashes with your reason, an emotion that you cannot explain or control, is only the carcass of that stale thinking which you forbade your mind to revise.

“Whenever you committed the evil of refusing to think and to see, of exempting from the absolute of reality some one small wish of yours, whenever you chose to say: Let me withdraw from the judgment of reason the cookies I stole, or the existence of God, let me have my one irrational whim and I will be a man of reason about all else—*that* was the act of subverting your consciousness, the act of corrupting your mind. Your mind then became a fixed jury who takes orders from a secret underworld, whose verdict distorts the evidence to fit an absolute it dares not touch—and a censored reality is the result, a splintered reality where the bits you chose to see are floating among the chasms of those you didn.’t, held together by that embalming fluid of the mind which is an emotion exempted from thought.

“The links you strive to drown are causal connections. The enemy you seek to defeat is the law of causality: it permits you no miracles. The law of causality is the law of identity applied to action. All actions are caused by entities. The nature of an action is caused and determined by the nature of the entities that act; a thing cannot act in contradiction to its nature. An action not caused by an entity

would be caused by a zero, which would mean a zero controlling a thing, a nonentity controlling an entity, the non-existent ruling the existent—which is the universe of your teachers' desire, the *cause* of their doctrines of causeless action, the *reason* of their revolt against reason, the goal of their morality, their politics, their economics, the ideal they strive for: the reign of the zero.

“The law of identity does not permit you to have your cake and eat it, too. The law of causality does not permit you to eat your cake *b*.efore you have it. But if you drown both laws in the blanks of your mind, if you pretend to yourself and to others that you don't see—then you can try to proclaim your right to eat your cake today and mine tomorrow, you can preach that the way to have a cake is to eat it first, before you bake it, that the way to produce is to start by consuming, that all wishers have an equal claim to all things, since nothing is caused by anything. The corollary of the *causeless* in matter is the *unearned* in spirit.

“Whenever you rebel against causality, your motive is the fraudulent desire, not to escape it, but worse: to reverse it. You want unearned love, as if love, the effect, could give you personal value, the cause—you want unearned admiration, as if admiration, the effect, could give you virtue, the cause—you want unearned wealth, as if wealth, the effect, could give you ability, the cause—you plead for mercy, *mercy*, not justice, as if an unearned forgiveness could wipe out the cause of your plea. And to indulge your ugly little shams, you support the doctrines of your teachers, while they run hog-wild proclaiming that spending, the effect, creates riches, the cause, that machinery, the effect, creates intelligence, the cause, that your sexual desires, the effect, create your philosophical values, the cause.

“Who pays for the orgy? Who causes the causeless? Who are the victims, condemned to remain unacknowledged and to perish in silence, lest their agony disturb your pretense that they do not exist? *We* are, we, the men of the mind.

“We are the *cause* of all the values that you covet, we who perform the process of thinking, which is the process of defining *identity* and discovering *causal connections*. We taught you to know, to speak, to produce, to desire, to love. You who abandon reason—were it not for us who preserve it, you would not be able to fulfill or even to conceive your wishes. You would not be able to desire the clothes that had not been made, the automobile that had not been invented, the money that had not been devised, as exchange for goods that did not exist, the admiration that had not been experienced for men who had achieved nothing, the love that belongs and pertains only to those who preserve their capacity to think, to choose, *to value*.

“You—who leap like a savage out of the jungle of your feelings into the Fifth Avenue of *our* New York and proclaim that you want to keep the electric lights,

but to destroy the generators—it is *our* wealth that you use while destroying us, it is *our* values that you use while damning us, it is *our* language that you use while denying the mind.

“Just as your mystics of spirit invented their heaven in the image of our earth, omitting our existence, and promised you rewards created by miracle out of non-matter—so your modern mystics of muscle omit our existence and promise you a heaven where matter shapes itself of its own causeless will into all the rewards desired by your non-mind.

“For centuries, the mystics of spirit had existed by running a protection racket—by making life on earth unbearable, then charging you for consolation and relief, by forbidding all the virtues that make existence possible, then riding on the shoulders of your guilt, by declaring production and joy to be sins, then collecting blackmail from the sinners. We, the men of the mind, were the unnamed victims of their creed, we who were willing to break their moral code and to bear damnation for the sin of reason—we who thought and acted, while they wished and prayed—we who were moral outcasts, we who were boot leggers of life when life was held to be a crime—while they basked in moral glory for the virtue of surpassing material greed and of distributing in selfless charity the material goods produced by-blank-out.

“Now we are chained and commanded to produce by savages who do not grant us even the identification of sinners—by savages who proclaim that we do not exist, then threaten to deprive us of the life we don’t possess, if we fail to provide them with the goods we don’t produce. Now we are expected to continue running railroads and to know the minute when a train will arrive after crossing the span of a continent, we are expected to continue running steel mills and to know the molecular structure of every drop of metal in the cables of your bridges and in the body of the airplanes that support you in mid-air-while the tribes of your grotesque little mystics of muscle fight over the carcass of our world, gibbering in sounds of non-language that there are no principles, no absolutes, no knowledge, no mind.

“Dropping below the level of a savage, who believes that the magic words he utters have the power to alter reality, they believe that reality can be altered by the power of the words they do not utter—and their magic tool is the blank-out, the pretense that nothing can come into existence past the voodoo of their refusal to identify it.

“As they feed on stolen wealth in body, so they feed on stolen concepts in mind, and proclaim that honesty consists of refusing to know that one is stealing. As they use effects while denying causes, so they use our concepts while denying the roots and the existence of the concepts they are using. As they seek,

not to build, but to *take over* industrial plants, so they seek, not to think, but to *take over* human thinking.

“As they proclaim that the only requirement for running a factory is the ability to turn the cranks of the machines, and blank out the question of who created the factory—so they proclaim that there are no entities, that nothing exists but motion, and blank out the fact that *motion* presupposes the thing which moves, that without the concept of entity, there can be no such concept as ‘motion.’ As they proclaim their right to consume the unearned, and blank out the question of who’s to produce it—so they proclaim that there is no law of identity, that nothing exists but change, and blank out the fact that *change* presupposes the concepts of what changes, from what and to what, that without the law of identity no such concept as ‘change’ is possible. As they rob an industrialist while denying his value, so they seek to seize power over all of existence while denying that existence exists.

“. ‘We know that we know nothing,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are claiming knowledge—‘There are no absolutes,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that they are uttering an absolute—‘You cannot *prove* that you exist or that you’re conscious,’ they chatter, blanking out the fact that *proof* presupposes existence, consciousness and a complex chain of knowledge: the existence of something to know, of a consciousness able to know it, and of a knowledge that has learned to distinguish between such concepts as the proved and the unproved.

“When a savage who has not learned to speak declares that existence must be proved, he is asking you to prove it by means of non-existence—when he declares that your consciousness must be proved, he is asking you to prove it by means of unconsciousness—he is asking you to step into a void outside of existence and consciousness to give him proof of both—he is asking you to become a zero gaining knowledge about a zero.

“When he declares that an axiom is a matter of arbitrary choice and he doesn’t choose to accept the axiom that he exists, he blanks out the fact that he has accepted it by uttering that sentence, that the only way to reject it is to shut one’s mouth, expound no theories and die.

“An axiom is a statement that identifies the base of knowledge and of any further statement pertaining to that knowledge, a statement necessarily contained in all others, whether any particular speaker chooses to identify it or not. An axiom is a proposition that defeats its opponents by the fact that they have to accept it and use it in the process of any attempt to deny it. Let the caveman who does not choose to accept the axiom of identity, try to present his theory without using the concept of identity or any concept derived from it—let the anthropoid

who does not choose to accept the existence of nouns, try to devise a language without nouns, adjectives or verbs—let the witch-doctor who does not choose to accept the validity of sensory perception, try to prove it without using the data he obtained by sensory perception -let the head-hunter who does not choose to accept the validity of logic, try to prove it without using logic—let the pigmy who proclaims that a skyscraper needs no foundation after it reaches its fiftieth story, yank the base from under his building, not yours—let the cannibal who snarls that the freedom of man's mind was needed to create an industrial civilization, but is not needed to *maintain* it, be given an arrowhead and bearskin, not a university chair of economics.

“Do you think they are taking you back to dark ages? They are taking you back to darker ages than any your history has known. Their goal is not the era of pre-science, but the era of pre-language. Their purpose is to deprive you of the concept on which man's mind, his life and his culture depend: the concept of an *objective* reality. Identify the development of a human consciousness—and you will know the purpose of their creed.

“A savage is a being who has not grasped that A is A and that reality is real. He has arrested his mind at the level of a baby's, at the stage when a consciousness acquires its initial sensory perceptions and has not learned to distinguish solid objects. It is to a baby that the world appears as a blur of motion, without things that move—and the birth of his mind is the day when he grasps that the streak that keeps flickering past him is his mother and the whirl beyond her is a curtain, that the two are solid entities and neither can turn into the other, that they *are* what they are, that they *exist*. The day when he grasps that matter has no volition is the day when he grasps that *he* has—and this is his birth as a human being. The day when he grasps that the reflection he sees in a mirror is not a delusion, that it is real, but it is not himself, that the mirage he sees in a desert is not a delusion, that the air and the light rays that cause it are real, but it is not a city, it is a city's reflection—the day when he grasps that he is not a passive recipient of the sensations of any given moment, that his senses do not provide him with automatic knowledge in separate snatches independent of context, but only with the material of knowledge, which his mind must learn to integrate—the day when he grasps that his senses cannot deceive him, that physical objects cannot act without causes, that his organs of perception are physical and have no volition, no power to invent or to distort, that the evidence they give him is an absolute, but his mind must learn to understand it, his mind must discover the nature, the causes, the full context of his sensory material, his mind must identify the things that he perceives—*that* is the day of his birth as a thinker and scientist.

“We are the men who reach that day; you are the men who choose to reach it partly; a savage is a man who never does.

“To a savage, the world is a place of unintelligible miracles where anything is possible to inanimate matter and nothing is possible to him. His world is not the unknown, but that irrational horror: the unknowable. He believes that physical objects are endowed with a mysterious volition, moved by *causeless*, unpredictable whims, while *he* is a helpless pawn at the mercy of forces beyond his control. He believes that nature is ruled by demons who possess an omnipotent power and that reality is their fluid plaything, where they can turn his bowl of meal into a snake and his wife into a beetle at any moment, where the A he has never discovered can be any non-A they choose, where the only knowledge he possesses is that he must not attempt to know. He can count on nothing, he can only *wish*, and he spends his life on wishing, on begging his demons to grant him his wishes by the arbitrary power of their will, giving them credit when they do, taking the blame when they don’t, offering them sacrifices in token of his gratitude and sacrifices in token of his guilt, crawling on his belly in fear and worship of sun and moon and wind and rain and of any thug who announces himself as their spokesman, provided his words are unintelligible and his mask sufficiently frightening—he wishes, begs and crawls, and dies, leaving you, as a record of his view of existence, the distorted monstrosities of his idols, part-man, part-animal, part-spider, the embodiments of the world of non-A.

“His is the intellectual state of your modern teachers and his is the world to which they want to bring you.

“If you wonder by what means they propose to do it, walk into any college classroom and you will hear your professors teaching your children that man can be certain of nothing, that his consciousness has no validity whatever, that he can learn no facts and no laws of existence, that he’s incapable of knowing an objective reality. What, then, is his standard of knowledge and truth? Whatever others *believe*, is their answer. There is no knowledge, they teach, there’s only *faith*: your belief that you exist is an act of faith, no more valid than another’s faith in his right to kill you; the axioms of science are an act of faith, no more valid than a mystic’s faith in revelations; the belief that electric light can be produced by a generator is an act of faith, no more valid than the belief that it can be produced by a rabbit’s foot kissed under a stepladder on the first of the moon—truth is whatever people want it to be, and *people* are everyone except yourself; reality is whatever people choose to say it is, there are no objective facts, there are only people’s arbitrary wishes—a man who seeks knowledge in a laboratory by means of test tubes and logic is an old-fashioned, superstitious fool; a true scientist is a man who goes around taking public polls—and if it

weren't for the selfish greed of the manufacturers of steel girders, who have a vested interest in obstructing the progress of science, you would learn that New York City does not exist, because a poll of the entire population of the world would tell you by a landslide majority that their *beliefs* forbid its existence.

"For centuries, the mystics of spirit have proclaimed that faith is superior to reason, but have not dared deny the existence of reason. Their heirs and product, the mystics of muscle, have completed their job and achieved their dream: they proclaim that everything is faith, and call it a revolt against believing. As revolt against unproved assertions, they proclaim that nothing can be proved; as revolt against supernatural knowledge, they proclaim that no knowledge is possible; as revolt against the enemies of science, they proclaim that science is superstition; as revolt against the enslavement of the mind, they proclaim that there is no mind.

"If you surrender your power to perceive, if you accept the switch of your standard from the *objective* to the collective and wait for mankind to tell you what to think, you will find another switch taking place before the eyes you have renounced: you will find that your teachers become the rulers of the collective, and if you then refuse to obey them, protesting that they are not the whole of mankind, they will answer : 'By what means do you know that we are not? *Are*, brother? Where did you get that old-fashioned term?'

"If you doubt that such is their purpose, observe with what passionate consistency the mystics of muscle are striving to make you forget that a concept such as '*mind*' has ever existed. Observe the twists of undefined verbiage, the words with rubber meanings, the terms left floating in midstream, by means of which they try to get around the recognition of the concept of '*thinking*.' Your consciousness, they tell you, consists of 'reflexes,' 'reactions,' 'experiences,' 'urges,' and 'drives' -and refuse to identify the means by which they acquired that knowledge, to identify the act they are performing when they tell it or the act you are performing when you listen. Words have the power to '.condition' you, they say and refuse to identify the reason why words have the power to change your-blank-out. A student reading a book understands it through a process of-blank-out. A scientist working on an invention is engaged in the activity of-blank-out. A psychologist helping a neurotic to solve a problem and untangle a conflict, does it by means of-blank-out. An industrialist-blank-out-there is no such person. A factory is a 'natural resource,' like a tree, a rock or a mud puddle.

"The problem of production, they tell you, has been solved and deserves no study or concern; the only problem left for your '.reflexes' to solve is now the problem of distribution. Who solved the problem of production? Humanity, they

answer. What was the solution ? The goods are here. How did they get here? Somehow. What caused it? Nothing has causes.

“They proclaim that every man born is entitled to exist without labor and, the laws of reality to the contrary notwithstanding, is entitled to receive his ‘minimum sustenance’.—his food, his clothes, his shelter—with no effort on his part, as his due and his birthright. To receive it—from whom? Blank-out. Every man, they announce, owns an equal share of the technological benefits created in the world. Created—by whom? Blank-out. Frantic cowards who posture as defenders of industrialists now define the purpose of economics as ‘an adjustment between the unlimited desires of men and the goods supplied in limited quantity.’ Supplied—by whom? Blank-out. Intellectual hoodlums who pose as professors, shrug away the thinkers of the past by declaring that their social theories were based on the impractical assumption that man was a rational being—but since men are not rational, they declare, there ought to be established a system that will make it possible for them to exist while being *irrational*, which means: while defying reality. Who will make it possible? Blank-out. Any stray mediocrity rushes into print with plans to control the production of mankind—and whoever agrees or disagrees with his statistics, no one questions his right to enforce his plans by means of a gun. Enforce—on whom? Blank-out. Random females with causeless incomes flitter on trips around the globe and return to deliver the message that the backward peoples of the world *demand* a higher standard of living. Demand—of whom? Blank-out.

“And to forestall any inquiry into the cause of the difference between a jungle village and New York City, they resort to the ultimate obscenity of explaining man’s industrial progress—skyscrapers, cable bridges, power motors, railroad trains—by declaring that man is an animal who possesses an *‘instinct of tool-making.’*

“Did you wonder what is wrong with the world? You are now seeing the climax of the creed of the uncaused and unearned. All your gangs of mystics, of spirit or muscle, are fighting one another for power to rule you, snarling that love is the solution for all the problems of your spirit and that a whip is the solution for all the problems of your body—you who have agreed to have no mind. Granting man less dignity than they grant to cattle, ignoring what an animal trainer could tell them—that no animal can be trained by fear, that a tortured elephant will trample its torturer, but will not work for him or carry his burdens - they expect man to continue to produce electronic tubes, supersonic airplanes, atom-smashing engines and interstellar telescopes, with his ration of meat for reward and a lash on his back for incentive.

“Make no mistake about the character of mystics. To undercut your

consciousness has always been their only purpose throughout the ages -and *power*, the power to rule you by force, has always been their only lust.

“From the rites of the jungle witch-doctors, which distorted reality into grotesque absurdities, stunted the minds of their victims and kept them in terror of the supernatural for stagnant stretches of centuries-to the supernatural doctrines of the Middle Ages, which kept men huddling on the mud floors of their hovels, in terror that the devil might steal the soup they had worked eighteen hours to earn-to the seedy little smiling professor who assures you that your brain has no capacity to think, that you have no means of perception and must blindly obey the omnipotent will of that supernatural force: Society—all of it is the same performance for the same and only purpose: to reduce you to the kind of pulp that has surrendered the validity of its consciousness.

“But it cannot be done to you without your consent. If you permit it to be done, you deserve it.

“When you listen to a mystic’s harangue on the impotence of the human mind and begin to doubt *your* consciousness, not his, when you permit your precariously semi-rational state to be shaken by any assertion and decide it is safer to trust his superior certainty and knowledge, the joke is on both of you: your sanction is the only source of certainty he has. The supernatural power that a mystic dreads, the unknowable spirit he worships, the consciousness he considers omnipotent is—*yours*.

“A mystic is a man who surrendered his mind at its first encounter with the minds of others. Somewhere in the distant reaches of his childhood, when his own understanding of reality clashed with the assertions of others, with their arbitrary orders and contradictory demands, he gave in to so craven a fear of independence that he renounced his rational faculty. At the crossroads of the choice between ‘I know’ and ‘.They say,.’ he chose the authority of others, he chose to submit rather than to understand, to *believe* rather than to think. Faith in the supernatural begins as faith in the superiority of others. His surrender took the form of the feeling that he must hide his lack of understanding, that others possess some mysterious knowledge of which he alone is deprived, that reality is whatever they want it to be, through some means forever denied to him.

“From then on, afraid to think, he is left at the mercy of unidentified feelings. His feelings become his only guide, his only remnant of personal identity, he clings to them with ferocious possessiveness—and whatever thinking he does is devoted to the struggle of hiding from himself that the nature of his feelings is terror.

“When a mystic declares that he *feels* the existence of a power superior to reason, he feels it all right, but that power is not an omniscient super-spirit of the

universe, it is the consciousness of any passer-by to whom he has surrendered his own. A mystic is driven by the urge to impress, to cheat, to flatter, to deceive, *to force* that omnipotent consciousness of others. ‘*They*’ are his only key to reality, he feels that he cannot exist save by harnessing their mysterious power and extorting their unaccountable consent. ‘*They*’ are his only means of perception and, like a blind man who depends on the sight of a dog, he feels he must leash them in order to live. To control the consciousness of others becomes his only passion; power-lust is a weed that grows only in the vacant lots of an abandoned mind.

“Every dictator is a mystic, and every mystic is a potential dictator. A mystic craves obedience from men, not their agreement. He wants them to surrender their consciousness to his assertions, his edicts, his wishes, his whims—as his consciousness is surrendered to theirs. He wants to deal with men by means of faith and force—he finds no satisfaction in their consent if he must earn it by means of facts and reason. Reason is the enemy he dreads and, simultaneously, considers precarious; reason, to him, is a means of deception; he *feels* that men possess some power more potent than reason—and only their causeless belief or their forced obedience can give him a sense of security, a proof that he has gained control of the mystic endowment he lacked. His lust is to command, not to convince: conviction requires an act of independence and rests on the absolute of an objective reality. What he seeks is power over reality and over men’s means of perceiving it, their mind, the power to interpose his will between existence and consciousness, as if, by agreeing to fake the reality he orders them to fake, men would, in fact, create it.

“Just as the mystic is a parasite in matter, who expropriates the wealth created by others—just as he is a parasite in spirit, who plunders the ideas created by others—so he falls below the level of a lunatic who creates his own distortion of reality, to the level of a parasite of lunacy who seeks a distortion created by others.

“There is only one state that fulfills the mystic’s longing for infinity, non-causality, non-identity: *death*. No matter what unintelligible causes he ascribes to his incommunicable feelings, whoever rejects reality rejects existence—and the feelings that move him from then on are hatred for all the values of man’s life, and lust for all the evils that destroy it. A mystic relishes the spectacle of suffering, of poverty, subservience and terror; these give him a feeling of triumph, a proof of the defeat of rational reality. But no other reality exists.

“No matter whose welfare he professes to serve, be it the welfare of God or of that disembodied gargoyle he describes as ‘The People,’ no matter what ideal he proclaims in terms of some supernatural dimension—in *fact*, in *reality*, on *earth*,

his ideal is *death*, his craving is to kill, his only satisfaction is to torture.

“Destruction is the only end that the mystics’ creed has ever achieved, as it is the only end that you see them achieving today, and if the ravages wrought by their acts have not made them question their doctrines, if they profess to be moved by love, yet are not deterred by piles of human corpses, it is because the truth about their souls is worse than the obscene excuse you have allowed them, the excuse that the end justifies the means and that the horrors they practice are means to nobler ends. The truth is that those horrors are their ends.

“You who’re depraved enough to believe that you could adjust yourself to a mystic’s dictatorship and could please him by obeying his orders—there is no way to please him; when you obey, he will reverse his orders; he seeks obedience for the sake of obedience and destruction for the sake of destruction. You who are craven enough to believe that you can make terms with a mystic by giving in to his extortions—there is no way to buy him off, the bribe he wants is your life, as slowly or as fast as you are willing to give it in—and the monster he seeks to bribe is the hidden blank-out in his mind, which drives him to kill in order not to learn that the death he desires is his own.

“You who are innocent enough to believe that the forces let loose in your world today are moved by greed for material plunder—the mystics’ scramble for spoils is only a screen to conceal from their mind the nature of their motive. Wealth is a means of human life, and they clamor for wealth in imitation of living beings, to pretend to themselves that they desire to live. But their swinish indulgence in plundered luxury is not enjoyment, it is escape. They do not want to own your fortune, they want you to lose it; they do not want to succeed, they want you to fail; they do not want to live, they want you to die; they desire nothing, they hate existence, and they keep running, each trying not to learn that the object of his hatred is himself.

“You who’ve never grasped the nature of evil, you who describe them as ‘misguided idealists’.—may the God you invented forgive you!—*they* are the essence of evil, they, those anti-living objects who seek, by devouring the world, to fill the *selfless* zero of their soul. It is not your wealth that they’re after. Theirs is a conspiracy against the mind, which means: against life and man.

“It is a conspiracy without leader or direction, and the random little thugs of the moment who cash in on the agony of one land or another are chance scum riding the torrent from the broken dam of the sewer of centuries, from the reservoir of hatred for reason, for logic, for ability, for achievement, for joy, stored by every whining anti-human who ever preached the superiority of the .‘heart’ over the mind.

“It is a conspiracy of all those who seek, not to live, but to *get away with*

living, those who seek to cut just one small corner of reality and are drawn, by feeling, to all the others who are busy cutting other corners—a conspiracy that unites by links of evasion all those who pursue a *zero* as a value: the professor who, unable to think, takes pleasure in crippling the mind of his students, the businessman who, to protect his stagnation, takes pleasure in chaining the ability of competitors, the neurotic who, to defend his self-loathing, takes pleasure in breaking men of self-esteem, the incompetent who takes pleasure in defeating achievement, the mediocrity who takes pleasure in demolishing greatness, the eunuch who takes pleasure in the castration of all pleasure—and all their intellectual munition-makers, all those who preach that the immolation of virtue will transform vices into virtue. *Death* is the premise at the root of their theories, *death* is the goal of their actions in practice—and *you* are the last of their victims.

“We, who were the living buffers between you and the nature of your creed, are no longer there to save you from the effects of your chosen beliefs. We are no longer willing to pay with our lives the debts you incurred in yours or the moral deficit piled up by all the generations behind you. You had been living on borrowed time—and I am the man who has called in the loan.

“I am the man whose existence your blank-outs were intended to permit you to ignore. I am the man whom you did not want either to live or to die. You did not want me to live, because you were afraid of knowing that I carried the responsibility you dropped and that your lives depended upon me; you did not want me to die, because you knew .it.

“Twelve years ago, when I worked in your world, I was an inventor. I was one of a profession that came last in human history and will be first to vanish on the way back to the sub-human. An inventor is a man who asks ‘Why?’ of the universe and lets nothing stand between the answer and his mind.

“Like the man who discovered the use of steam or the man who discovered the use of oil, I discovered a source of energy which was available since the birth of the globe, but which men had not known how to use except as an object of worship, of terror and of legends about a thundering god. I completed the experimental model of a motor that would have made a fortune for me and for those who had hired me, a motor that would have raised the efficiency of every human installation using power and would have added the gift of higher productivity to every hour you spend at earning your living.

“Then, one night at a factory meeting, I heard myself sentenced to death by reason of my achievement. I heard three parasites assert that my brain and my life were their property, that my right to exist was conditional and depended on the satisfaction of their desires. The purpose of my ability, they said, was to

serve the needs of those who were less able. I had no right to live, they said, by reason of my competence .for living; their right to live was unconditional, by reason of their in competence.

“Then I saw what was wrong with the world, I saw what destroyed men and nations, and where the battle for life had to be fought. I saw that the enemy was an inverted morality—and that my sanction was its only power. I saw that evil was impotent—that evil was the irrational, the blind, the anti-real—and that the only weapon of its triumph was the willingness of the good to serve it. Just as the parasites around me were proclaiming their helpless dependence on my mind and were expecting me voluntarily to accept a slavery they had no power to enforce, just as they were counting on my self-immolation to provide them with the means of their plan—so throughout the world and throughout men’s history, in every version and form, from the extortions of loafing relatives to the atrocities of collectivized countries, it is the good, the able, the men of reason, who act as their own destroyers, who transfuse to evil the blood of their virtue and let evil transmit to them the poison of destruction, thus gaining for evil the power of survival, and for their own values—the impotence of death. I saw that there comes a point, in the defeat of any man of virtue, when his own consent is needed for evil to win—and that no manner of injury done to him by others can succeed if he chooses to withhold his consent. I saw that I could put an end to your outrages by pronouncing a single word in my mind. I pronounced it. The word was .‘No.’

“I quit that factory. I quit your world. I made it my job to warn your victims and to give them the method and the weapon to fight you. The method was to refuse to deflect retribution. The weapon was justice.

“If you want to know what you lost when I quit and when my strikers deserted your world—stand on an empty stretch of soil in a wilderness unexplored by men and ask yourself what manner of survival you would achieve and how long you would last if you refused to think, with no one around to teach you the motions, or, if you chose to think, how much your mind would be able to discover—ask yourself how many independent conclusions you have reached in the course of your life and how much of your time was spent on performing the actions you learned from others—ask yourself whether you would be able to discover how to till the soil and grow your food, whether you would be able to invent a wheel, a lever, an induction coil, a generator, an electronic tube—then decide whether men of ability are exploiters who live by the fruit of *your* labor and rob you of the wealth that *you* produce, and whether you dare to believe that you possess the power to enslave them. Let your women take a look at a jungle female with her shriveled face and pendulous breasts, as she sits grinding meal

in a bowl, hour after hour, century by century—then let them ask themselves whether their ‘instinct of tool-making’ will provide them with their electric refrigerators, their washing machines and vacuum cleaners, and, if not, whether they care to destroy those who provided it all, but not ‘by instinct.’

“Take a look around you, you savages who stutter that ideas are created by men’s means of production, that a machine is not the product of human thought, but a mystical power that produces human thinking. You have never discovered the industrial age—and you cling to the morality of the barbarian eras when a miserable form of human subsistence was produced by the muscular labor of slaves. Every mystic had always longed for slaves, to protect him from the material reality he dreaded. But you, you grotesque little atavists, stare blindly at the skyscrapers and smokestacks around you and dream of enslaving the material providers who are scientists, inventors, industrialists. When you clamor for public ownership of the means of production, you are clamoring for public ownership of the mind. I have taught my strikers that the answer you deserve is only: ‘Try and get it.’

“You proclaim yourself unable to harness the forces of inanimate matter, yet propose to harness the minds of men who are able to achieve the feats you cannot equal. You proclaim that you cannot survive without us, yet propose to dictate the terms of our survival. You proclaim that you need us, yet indulge the impertinence of asserting your right to rule us by force—and expect that we, who are not afraid of that physical nature which fills you with terror, will cower at the sight of any lout who has talked you into voting him a chance to command us.

“You propose to establish a social order based on the following tenets: that you’re incompetent to run your own life, but competent to run the lives of others—that you’re unfit to exist in freedom, but fit to become an omnipotent ruler—that you’re unable to earn your living by the use of your own intelligence, but able to judge politicians and to vote them into jobs of total power over arts you have never seen, over sciences you have never studied, over achievements of which you have no knowledge, over the gigantic industries where you, by your own definition of your capacity, would be unable successfully to fill the job of assistant greaser.

“This idol of your cult of zero-worship, this symbol of impotence—the congenital dependent—is your image of man and your standard of value, in whose likeness you strive to refashion your soul. ‘It’s only human,’ you cry in defense of any depravity, reaching the stage of self-abasement where you seek to make the concept ‘human’ mean the weakling, the fool, the rotter, the liar, the failure, the coward, the fraud, and to exile from the human race the hero, the

thinker, the producer, the inventor, the strong, the purposeful, the pure—as if ‘to feel’ were human, but to think were not, as if to fail were human, but to succeed were not, as if corruption were human, but virtue were not—as if the premise of *death* were proper to man, but the premise of *life* were not.

“In order to deprive us of honor, that you may then deprive us of our wealth, you have always regarded us as slaves who deserve no moral recognition. You praise any venture that claims to be non-profit, and damn the men who made the profits that make the venture possible. You regard as ‘in the public interest’ any project serving those who do not pay; it is not in the public interest to provide any services for those who do the paying. ‘Public benefit’ is anything given as alms; to engage in trade is to injure the public. ‘Public welfare’ is the welfare of those who do not earn it; those who do, are entitled to no welfare. ‘*The public*,’ to you, is whoever has failed to achieve any virtue or value; whoever achieves it, whoever provides the goods you require for survival, ceases to be regarded as part of the public or as part of the human race.

“What blank-out permitted you to hope that you could get away with this muck of contradictions and to plan it as an ideal society, when the ‘No’ of your victims was sufficient to demolish the whole of your structure? What permits any insolent beggar to wave his sores in the face of his betters and to plead for help in the tone of a threat? You cry, as he does, that you are counting on our pity, but your secret hope is the moral code that has taught you to count on our *guilt*. You expect us to feel guilty of our virtues in the presence of your vices, wounds and failures—guilty of succeeding at existence, guilty of enjoying the life that you damn, yet beg us to help you to live.

“Did you want to know who is John Galt? I am the first man of ability who refused to regard it as guilt. I am the first man who would not do penance for my virtues or let them be used as the tools of my destruction. I am the first man who would not suffer martyrdom at the hands of those who wished me to perish for the privilege of keeping them alive. I am the first man who told them that I did not need them, and until they learned to deal with me as traders, giving value for value, they would have to exist without me, as I would exist without them; then I would let them learn whose is the need and whose the ability—and if human survival is the standard, whose terms would set the way to survive.

“I have done by plan and intention what had been done throughout history by silent default. There have always been men of intelligence who went on strike, in protest and despair, but they did not know the meaning of their action. The man who retires from public life, to think, but not to share his thoughts—the man who chooses to spend his years in the obscurity of menial employment, keeping to himself the fire of his mind, never giving it form, expression or reality,

refusing to bring it into a world he despises—the man who is defeated by revulsion, the man who renounces before he has started, the man who gives up rather than give in, the man who functions at a fraction of his capacity, disarmed by his longing for an ideal he has not found—they are on strike, on strike against unreason, on strike against your world and your values. But not knowing any values of their own, they abandon the quest to know—in the darkness of their hopeless indignation, which is righteous without knowledge of the right, and passionate without knowledge of desire, they concede to you the power of reality and surrender the incentives of their mind—and they perish in bitter futility, as rebels who never learned the object of their rebellion, as lovers who never discovered their love.

“The infamous times you call the Dark Ages were an era of intelligence on strike, when men of ability went underground and lived undiscovered, studying in secret, and died, destroying the works of their mind, when only a few of the bravest of martyrs remained to keep the human race alive. Every period ruled by mystics was an era of stagnation and want, when most men were on strike against existence, working for less than their barest survival, leaving nothing but scraps for their rulers to loot, refusing to think, to venture, to produce, when the ultimate collector of their profits and the final authority on truth or error was the whim of some gilded degenerate sanctioned as superior to reason by divine right and by grace of a club. The road of human history was a string of blank-outs over sterile stretches eroded by faith and force, with only a few brief bursts of sunlight, when the released energy of the men of the mind performed the wonders you gaped at, admired and promptly extinguished again.

“But there will be no extinction, this time. The game of the mystics is up. You will perish in and by your own unreality. We, the men of reason, will survive.

“I have called out on strike the kind of martyrs who had never deserted you before. I have given them the weapon they had lacked: the knowledge of their own moral value. I have taught them that the world is ours, whenever we choose to claim it, by virtue and grace of the fact that ours is the Morality of Life. They, the great victims who had produced all the wonders of humanity’s brief summer, they, the industrialists, the conquerors of matter, had not discovered the nature of their right. They had known that theirs was the power. I taught them that theirs was the glory.

“You, who dare to regard us as the moral inferiors of any mystic who claims supernatural visions—you, who scramble like vultures for plundered pennies, yet honor a fortune-teller above a fortune-maker—you, who scorn a businessman as ignoble, but esteem any posturing artist as exalted—the root of your standards is that mystic miasma which comes from primordial swamps, that

cult of death, which pronounces a businessman immoral by reason of the fact that he keeps you alive. You, who claim that you long to rise above the crude concerns of the body, above the drudgery of serving mere physical needs—*who* is enslaved by physical needs: the Hindu who labors from sunrise to sunset at the shafts of a hand-plow for a bowl of rice, or the American who is driving a tractor? *Who* is the conqueror of physical reality: the man who sleeps on a bed of nails or the man who sleeps on an inner-spring mattress? *Which* is the monument to the triumph of the human spirit over matter: the germ-eaten hovels on the shorelines of the Ganges or the Atlantic skyline of New York?

“Unless you learn the answers to these questions—and learn to stand at reverent attention when you face the achievements of man’s mind—you will not stay much longer on this earth, which we love and will not permit you to damn. You will not sneak by with the rest of your lifespan. I have foreshortened the usual course of history and have let you discover the nature of the payment you had hoped to switch to the shoulders of others. It is the last of your own living power that will now be drained to provide the unearned for the worshippers and carriers of Death. Do not pretend that a malevolent reality defeated you—you were defeated by your own evasions. Do not pretend that you will perish for a noble ideal—you will perish as fodder for the haters of man.

“But to those of you who still retain a remnant of the dignity and will to love one’s life, I am offering the chance to make a choice. Choose whether you wish to perish for a morality you have never believed or practiced. Pause on the brink of self-destruction and examine your values and your life. You had known how to take an inventory of your wealth. Now take an inventory of your mind.

“Since childhood, you have been hiding the guilty secret that you feel no desire to be moral, no desire to seek self-immolation, that you dread and hate your code, but dare not say it even to yourself, that you’re devoid of those moral ‘instincts’ which others profess to feel. The less you felt, the louder you proclaimed your selfless love and servitude to others, in dread of ever letting them discover your own self, the self that you betrayed, the self that you kept in concealment, like a skeleton in the closet of your body. And they, who were at once your dupes and your deceivers, they listened and voiced their loud approval, in dread of ever letting you discover that they were harboring the same unspoken secret. Existence among you is a giant pretense, an act you all perform for one another, each feeling that he is the only guilty freak, each placing his moral authority in the unknowable known only to others, each faking the reality he feels they expect him to fake, none having the courage to break the vicious circle.

“No matter what dishonorable compromise you’ve made with your

impracticable creed, no matter what miserable balance, half-cynicism, half-superstition, you now manage to maintain, you still preserve the root, the lethal tenet: the belief that the moral and the practical are opposites. Since childhood, you have been running from the terror of a choice you have never dared fully to identify: If the *practical*, whatever you must practice to exist, whatever works, succeeds, achieves your purpose, whatever brings you food and joy, whatever profits you, is evil—and if the good, the moral, is the *impractical*, whatever fails, destroys, frustrates, whatever injures you and brings you loss or pain—then your choice is to be moral or to live.

“The sole result of that murderous doctrine was to remove morality from life. You grew up to believe that moral laws bear no relation to the job of living, except as an impediment and threat, that man’s existence is an amoral jungle where anything goes and anything works. And in that fog of switching definitions which descends upon a frozen mind, you have forgotten that the evils damned by your creed were the virtues required for living, and you have come to believe that actual evils are the *practical* means of existence. Forgetting that the impractical ‘good’ was self-sacrifice, you believe that self-esteem is impractical; forgetting that the practical ‘evil’ was production, you believe that robbery is practical.

“Swinging like a helpless branch in the wind of an uncharted moral wilderness; you dare not fully to be evil or fully to live. When you are honest, you feel the resentment of a sucker; when you cheat, you feel terror and shame. When you are happy, your joy is diluted by guilt; when you suffer, your pain is augmented by the feeling that pain is your natural state. You pity the men you admire, you believe they are doomed to fail; you envy the men you hate, you believe they are the masters of existence. You feel disarmed when you come up against a scoundrel: you believe that evil is bound to win, since the moral is the impotent, the *impractical*.

“Morality, to you, is a phantom scarecrow made of duty, of boredom, of punishment, of pain, a cross-breed between the first school-teacher of your past and the tax collector of your present, a scarecrow standing in a barren field, waving a stick to chase away your pleasures -and *pleasure*, to you, is a liquor-soggy brain, a mindless slut, the stupor of a moron who stakes his cash on some animal’s race, since pleasure cannot be moral.

“If you identify your actual belief, you will find a triple damnation -of yourself, of life, of virtue—in the grotesque conclusion you have reached: you believe that morality is a necessary evil.

“Do you wonder why you live without dignity, love without fire and die without resistance? Do you wonder why, wherever you look, you see nothing but

unanswerable questions, why your life is torn by impossible conflicts, why you spend it straddling irrational fences to evade artificial choices, such as soul or body, mind or heart, security or freedom, private profit or public good?

“Do you cry that you find no answers? By what means did you hope to find them? You reject your tool of perception—your mind—then complain that the universe is a mystery. You discard your key, then wail that all doors are locked against you. You start out in pursuit of the irrational, then damn existence for making no sense.

“The fence you have been straddling for two hours—while hearing my words and seeking to escape them—is the coward’s formula contained in the sentence: ‘But we don’t have to go to extremes!’ The extreme you have always struggled to avoid is the recognition that reality is final, that A is A and that the truth is true. A moral code impossible to practice, a code that demands imperfection or death, has taught you to dissolve all ideas in fog, to permit no firm definitions, to regard any concept as approximate and any rule of conduct as elastic, to hedge on any principle, to compromise on any value, to take the middle of any road. By extorting your acceptance of supernatural absolutes, it has forced you to reject the absolute of nature. By making moral judgments impossible, it has made you incapable of rational judgment. A code that forbids you to cast the first stone, has forbidden you to admit the identity of stones and to know when or if you’re being stoned.

“The man who refuses to judge, who neither agrees nor disagrees, who declares that there are no absolutes and believes that he escapes responsibility, is the man responsible for all the blood that is now spilled in the world. Reality is an absolute, existence is an absolute, a speck of dust is an absolute and so is a human life. Whether you live or die is an absolute. Whether you have a piece of bread or not, is an absolute. Whether you eat your bread or see it vanish into a looter’s stomach, is an absolute.

“There are two sides to every issue: one side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil. The man who is wrong still retains some respect for truth, if only by accepting the responsibility of choice. But the man in the middle is the knave who blanks out the truth in order to pretend that no choice or values exist, who is willing to sit out the course of any battle, willing to cash in on the blood of the innocent or to crawl on his belly to the guilty, who dispenses justice by condemning both the robber and the robbed to jail, who solves conflicts by ordering the thinker and the fool to meet each other halfway. In any compromise between food and poison, it is only death that can win. In any compromise between good and evil, it is only evil that can profit. In that transfusion of blood which drains the good to feed the evil, the compromiser is

the transmitting rubber tube.

“You, who are half-rational, half-coward, have been playing a con game with reality, but the victim you have conned is yourself. When men reduce their virtues to the approximate, then evil acquires the force of an absolute, when loyalty to an unyielding purpose is dropped by the virtuous, it’s picked up by scoundrels—and you get the indecent spectacle of a cringing, bargaining, traitorous good and a self-righteously uncompromising evil. As you surrendered to the mystics of muscle when they told you that ignorance consists of claiming knowledge, so now you surrender to them when they shriek that immorality consists of pronouncing moral judgment. When they yell that it is selfish to be certain that you are right, you hasten to assure them that you’re certain of nothing. When they shout that it’s immoral to stand on your convictions, you assure them that you have no convictions whatever. When the thugs of Europe’s People’s States snarl that you are guilty of intolerance, because you don’t treat your desire to live and their desire to kill you as a difference of opinion—you cringe and hasten to assure them that you are not intolerant of any horror. When some barefoot bum in some pesthole of Asia yells at you: How dare you be rich—you apologize and beg him to be patient and promise him you’ll give it all away.

“You have reached the blind alley of the treason you committed when you agreed that you had no right to exist. Once, you believed it was ‘only a compromise’: you conceded it was evil to live for yourself, but moral to live for the sake of your children. Then you conceded that it was selfish to live for your children, but moral to live for your community. Then you conceded that it was selfish to live for your community, but moral to live for your country. Now, you are letting this greatest of countries be devoured by any scum from any corner of the earth, while you concede that it is selfish to live for your country and that your moral duty is to live for the globe. A man who has no right to life, has no right to values and will not keep them.

“At the end of your road of successive betrayals, stripped of weapons, of certainty, of honor, you commit your final act of treason and sign your petition of intellectual bankruptcy: while the muscle-mystics of the People’s States proclaim that they’re the champions of reason and science, you agree and hasten to proclaim that *faith* is your cardinal principle, that reason is on the side of your destroyers, but yours is the side of faith. To the struggling remnants of rational honesty in the twisted, bewildered minds of your children, you declare that you can offer no rational argument to support the ideas that created this country, that there is no rational justification for freedom, for property, for justice, for rights, that they rest on a mystical insight and can be accepted only on faith, that in

reason and logic the enemy is right, but faith is superior to reason. You declare to your children that it is rational to loot, to torture, to enslave, to expropriate, to murder, but that they must resist the temptations of logic and stick to the discipline of remaining irrational—that skyscrapers, factories, radios, airplanes were the products of faith and mystic intuition, while famines, concentration camps and firing squads are the products of a reasonable manner of existence—that the industrial revolution was the revolt of the men of faith against that era of reason and logic which is known as the Middle Ages. Simultaneously, in the same breath, to the same child, you declare that the looters who rule the People's States will surpass this country in material production, since they are the representatives of science, but that it's evil to be concerned with physical wealth and that one must renounce material prosperity—you declare that the looters' ideals are noble, but they do not mean them, while you do; that your purpose in fighting the looters is only to accomplish their aims, which they cannot accomplish, but you can; and that the way to fight them is to beat them to it and give one's wealth away. Then you wonder why your children join the People's thugs or become half-crazed delinquents, you wonder why the looters' conquests keep creeping closer to your doors—and you blame it on human stupidity, declaring that the masses are impervious to reason.

“You blank out the open, public spectacle of the looters' fight against the mind, and the fact that their bloodiest horrors are unleashed to punish the crime of thinking. You blank out the fact that most mystics of muscle started out as mystics of spirit, that they keep switching from one to the other, that the men you call materialists and spiritualists are only two halves of the same dissected human, forever seeking completion, but seeking it by swinging from the destruction of the flesh to the destruction of the soul and vice versa—that they keep running from your colleges to the slave pens of Europe to an open collapse into the mystic muck of India, seeking any refuge against reality, any form of escape from the mind.

“You blank it out and cling to your hypocrisy of .‘faith’ in order to blank out the knowledge that the looters have a stranglehold upon you, which consists of your moral code—that the looters are the final and consistent practitioners of the morality you're half-obeying, half-evading—that they practice it the only way it can be practiced: by turning the earth into a sacrificial furnace—that your morality forbids you to oppose them in the only way they can be opposed: by refusing to become a sacrificial animal and proudly asserting your right to exist—that in order to fight them to the finish and with full rectitude, *it is your morality that you have to reject.*

“You blank it out, because your self-esteem is tied to that mystic

.‘unselfishness’ which you’ve never possessed or practiced, but spent so many years pretending to possess that the thought of denouncing it fills you with terror. No value is higher than self-esteem, but you’ve invested it in counterfeit securities--and now your morality has caught you in a trap where you are forced to protect your self-esteem by fighting for the creed of self-destruction. The grim joke is on you: that need of self-esteem, which you’re unable to explain or to define, belongs to *my* morality, not yours; it’s the objective token of my code, it is my proof within your own soul.

“By a feeling he has not learned to identify, but has derived from his first awareness of existence, from his discovery that he has to make choices, man knows that his desperate need of self-esteem is a matter of life or death. As a being of volitional consciousness, he knows that he must know his own value in order to maintain his own life. He knows that he has to be *right*; to be wrong in action means danger to his life; to be wrong in person, to be *evil*, means to be unfit for existence.

“Every act of man’s life has to be willed; the mere act of obtaining or eating his food implies that the person he preserves is worthy of being preserved; every pleasure he seeks to enjoy implies that the person who seeks it is worthy of finding enjoyment. He has no choice about his need of self-esteem, his only choice is the standard by which to gauge it. And he makes his fatal error when he switches this gauge protecting his life into the service of his own destruction, when he chooses a standard contradicting existence and sets his self-esteem against reality.

“Every form of causeless self-doubt, every feeling of inferiority and secret unworthiness is, in fact, man’s hidden dread of his inability to deal with existence. But the greater his terror, the more fiercely he clings to the murderous doctrines that choke him. No man can survive the moment of pronouncing himself irredeemably evil; should he do it, his next moment is insanity or suicide. To escape it—if he’s chosen an irrational standard—he will fake, evade, blank out; he will cheat himself of reality, of existence, of happiness, of mind; and he will ultimately cheat himself of self-esteem by struggling to preserve its illusion rather than to risk discovering its lack. To fear to face an issue is to believe that the worst is true.

“It is not any crime you have ever committed that infects your soul with permanent guilt, it is none of your failures, errors or flaws, but the *blank-out* by which you attempt to evade them—it is not any sort of Original Sin or unknown prenatal deficiency, but the knowledge and fact of your basic default, of suspending your mind, of refusing to think. Fear and guilt are your chronic emotions, they are real and you do deserve them, but they don’t come from the

superficial reasons you invent to disguise their cause, not from your 'selfishness,' weakness or ignorance, but from a real and basic threat to your existence: fear, because you have abandoned your weapon of survival, *guilt*, because you know you have done it volitionally.

"The *self* you have betrayed is your mind; *self-esteem* is reliance on one's power to think. The ego you seek, that essential 'you' which you cannot express or define, is not your emotions or inarticulate dreams, but your *intellect*, that judge of your supreme tribunal whom you've impeached in order to drift at the mercy of any stray shyster you describe as your '.feeling..'. Then you drag yourself through a self-made night, in a desperate quest for a nameless fire, moved by some fading vision of a dawn you had seen and lost.

"Observe the persistence, in mankind's mythologies, of the legend about a paradise that men had once possessed, the city of Atlantis or the Garden of Eden or some kingdom of perfection, always behind us. The root of that legend exists, not in the past of the race, but in the past of every man. You still retain a sense—not as firm as a memory, but diffused like the pain of hopeless longing—that somewhere in the starting years of your childhood, before you had learned to submit, to absorb the terror of unreason and to doubt the value of your mind, you had known a radiant state of existence, you had known the independence of a rational consciousness facing an open universe. *That* is the paradise which you have lost, which you seek—which is yours for the taking.

"Some of you will never know who is John Galt. But those of you who have known a single moment of love for existence and of pride in being its worthy lover, a moment of looking at this earth and letting your glance be its sanction, have known the state of being a man, and I—I am only the man who knew that that state is not to be betrayed. I am the man who knew what made it possible and who chose consistently to practice and to be what you had practiced and been in that one moment. .

"That choice is yours to make. That choice—the dedication to one's highest potential—is made by accepting the fact that the noblest act you have ever performed is the act of your mind in the process of grasping that two and two make four.

"Whoever you are—you who are alone with my words in this moment, with nothing but your honesty to help you understand—the choice is still open to be a human being, but the price is to start from scratch, to stand naked in the face of reality and, reversing a costly historical error, to declare: 'I am, therefore I'll think.'

"Accept the irrevocable fact that your life depends upon your mind. Admit that the whole of your struggle, your doubts, your fakes, your evasions, was a

desperate quest for escape from the responsibility of a volitional consciousness—a quest for automatic knowledge, for instinctive action, for intuitive certainty—and while you called it a longing for the state of an angel, what you were seeking was the state of an animal. Accept, as your moral ideal, the task of becoming a man.

“Do not say that you’re afraid to trust your mind because you know so little. Are you safer in surrendering to mystics and discarding the little that you know? Live and act within the limit of your knowledge and keep expanding it to the limit of your life. Redeem your mind from the hockshops of authority. Accept the fact that you are not omniscient, but playing a zombie will not give you omniscience—that your mind is fallible, but becoming mindless will not make you infallible—that an error made on your own is safer than ten truths accepted on faith, because the first leaves you the means to correct it, but the second destroys your capacity to distinguish truth from error. In place of your dream of an omniscient automaton, accept the fact that any knowledge man acquires is acquired by his own will and effort, and that *that* is his distinction in the universe, *that* is his nature, his morality, his glory.

“Discard that unlimited license to evil which consists of claiming that man is imperfect. By what standard do you damn him when you claim it? Accept the fact that in the realm of morality nothing less than perfection will do. But perfection is not to be gauged by mystic commandments to practice the impossible, and your moral stature is not to be gauged by matters not open to your choice. Man has a single basic choice: to think or not, and that is the gauge of his virtue. Moral perfection is an *unbreached rationality*—not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute.

“Learn to distinguish the difference between errors of knowledge and breaches of morality. An error of knowledge is not a moral flaw, provided you are willing to correct it; only a mystic would judge human beings by the standard of an impossible, automatic omniscience. But a breach of morality is the conscious choice of an action you know to be evil, or a willful evasion of knowledge, a suspension of sight and of thought. That which you do not know, is not a moral charge against you; but that which you refuse to know, is an account of infamy growing in your soul. Make every allowance for errors of knowledge; do not forgive or accept any breach of morality. Give the benefit of the doubt to those who seek to know; but treat as potential killers those specimens of insolent depravity who make demands upon you, announcing that they have and seek no reasons, proclaiming, as a license, that they ‘just feel it’—or those who reject an irrefutable argument by saying: ‘It’s only logic,’.

which means: 'It's only reality..'. The only realm opposed to reality is the realm and premise of death.

"Accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only *moral* purpose of your life, and that *happiness*—not pain or mindless self-indulgence—is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values. Happiness was the responsibility you dreaded, it required the kind of rational discipline you did not value yourself enough to assume—and the anxious staleness of your days is the monument to your evasion of the knowledge that there is no moral substitute for happiness, that there is no more despicable coward than the man who deserted the battle for his joy, fearing to assert his right to existence, lacking the courage and the loyalty to life of a bird or a flower reaching for the sun. Discard the protective rags of that vice which you called a virtue: humility—learn to value yourself, which means: to fight for your happiness—and when you learn that *pride* is the sum of all virtues, you will learn to live like a man.

"As a basic step of self-esteem, learn to treat as the mark of a cannibal any man's *demand* for your help. To demand it is to claim that your life is his property—and loathsome as such claim might be, there's something still more loathsome: your agreement. Do you ask if it's ever proper to help another man? No—if he claims it as his right or as a moral duty that you owe him. Yes—if such is your own desire based on your own selfish pleasure in the value of his person and his struggle. Suffering as such is not a value; only man's fight against suffering, is. If you choose to help a man who suffers, do it only on the ground of his virtues, of his fight to recover, of his rational record, or of the fact that he suffers unjustly ; then your action is still a trade, and his virtue is the payment for your help. But to help a man who has no virtues, to help him on the ground of his suffering as such, to accept his faults, his *need*, as a claim -is to accept the mortgage of a zero on your values. A man who has no virtues is a hater of existence who acts on the premise of death; to help him is to sanction his evil and to support his career of destruction. Be it only a penny you will not miss or a kindly smile he has not earned, a tribute to a zero is treason to life and to all those who struggle to maintain it. It is of such pennies and smiles that the desolation of your world was made.

"Do not say that my morality is too hard for you to practice and that you fear it as you fear the unknown. Whatever living moments you have known, were lived by the values of my code. But you stifled, negated, betrayed it. You kept sacrificing your virtues to your vices, and the best among men to the worst. Look around you : what you have done to society, you had done it first within your soul; one is the image of the other. This dismal wreckage, which is now your

world, is the physical form of the treason you committed to your values, to your friends, to your defenders, to your future, to your country, to yourself.

“We—whom you are now calling, but who will not answer any longer—we had lived among you, but you failed to know us, you refused to think and to see what we were. You failed to recognize the motor I invented—and it became, in *your* world, a pile of dead scrap. You failed to recognize the hero in your soul—and you failed to know me when I passed you in the street. When you cried in despair for the unattainable spirit which you felt had deserted your world, you gave it my name, but what you were calling was your own betrayed self-esteem. You will not recover one without the other.

“When you failed to give recognition to man’s mind and attempted to rule human beings by force—those who submitted had no mind to surrender; those who had, were men who don’t submit. Thus the man of productive genius assumed in *your* world the disguise of a playboy and became a destroyer of wealth, choosing to annihilate his fortune rather than surrender it to guns. Thus the thinker, the man of reason, assumed in *your* world the role of a pirate, to defend his values by force against your force, rather than submit to the rule of brutality. Do you hear me, Francisco d’Anconia and Ragnar Danneskjöld, my first friends, my fellow fighters, my fellow outcasts, in whose name and honor I speak?

“It was the three of us who started what I am now completing. It was the three of us who resolved to avenge this country and to release its imprisoned soul. This greatest of countries was built on *my* morality—on the inviolate supremacy of man’s right to exist—but you dreaded to admit it and live up to it. You stared at an achievement unequaled in history, you looted its effects and blanked out its cause. In the presence of that monument to human morality, which is a factory, a highway or a bridge—you kept damning this country as immoral and its progress as ‘material greed,’ you kept offering apologies for this country’s greatness to the idol of primordial starvation, to decaying Europe’s idol of a leprous, mystic bum.

“This country—the product of *reason*—could not survive on the morality of sacrifice. It was not built by men who sought self-immolation or by men who sought handouts. It could not stand on the mystic split that divorced man’s soul from his body. It could not live by the mystic doctrine that damned this earth as evil and those who succeeded on earth as depraved. From its start, this country was a threat to the ancient rule of mystics. In the brilliant rocket-explosion of its youth, this country displayed to an incredulous world what greatness was possible to man, what happiness was possible on earth. It was one or the other: America or mystics. The mystics knew it; you didn’t. You let them infect you

with the worship of *need-and* this country became a giant in body with a mooching midget in place of its soul, while its living soul was driven underground to labor and feed you in silence, unnamed, unhonored, negated, its soul and hero: the industrialist. Do you hear me now, Hank Rearden, the greatest of the victims I have avenged?

“Neither he nor the rest of us will return until the road is clear to rebuild this country—until the wreckage of the morality of sacrifice has been wiped out of our way. A country’s political system is based on its code of morality. We will rebuild America’s system on the moral premise which had been its foundation, but which you treated as a guilty underground, in your frantic evasion of the conflict between that premise and your mystic morality: the premise that man is an end in himself, not the means to the ends of others, that man’s life, his freedom, his happiness are his by inalienable right.

“You who’ve lost the concept of a right, you who swing in impotent evasiveness between the claim that rights are a gift of God, a supernatural gift to be taken on faith, or the claim that rights are a gift of society, to be broken at its arbitrary whim—the source of man’s rights is not divine law or congressional law, but the law of identity. A is A—and Man is Man. *Rights* are conditions of existence required by man’s nature for his proper survival. If man is to live on earth, it is *right* for him to use his mind, it is *right* to act on his own free judgment, it is *right* to work for his values and to keep the product of his work. If life on earth is his purpose, he has a *right* to live as a rational being: nature forbids him the irrational. Any group, any gang, any nation that attempts to negate man’s rights, is *wrong*, which means: is evil, which means: is anti-life.

“*Rights* are a moral concept—and morality is a matter of choice. Men are free not to choose man’s survival as the standard of their morals and their laws, but not free to escape from the fact that the alternative is a cannibal society, which exists for a while by devouring its best and collapses like a cancerous body, when the healthy have been eaten by the diseased, when the rational have been consumed by the irrational. Such has been the fate of your societies in history, but you’ve evaded the knowledge of the cause. I am here to state it: the agent of retribution was the law of identity, which you cannot escape. Just as man cannot live by means of the irrational, so two men cannot, or two thousand, or two billion. Just as man can’t succeed by defying reality, so a nation can’t, or a country, or a globe. A is A. The rest is a matter of time, provided by the generosity of victims.

“Just as man can’t exist without his body, so no rights can exist without the right to translate one’s rights into reality—to think, to work and to keep the results—which means: the right of property. The modern mystics of muscle who

offer you the fraudulent alternative of ‘human rights’ versus ‘property rights,’ as if one could exist without the other, are making a last, grotesque attempt to revive the doctrine of soul versus body. Only a ghost can exist without material property; only a slave can work with no right to the product of his effort. The doctrine that ‘human rights’ are superior to ‘property rights’ simply means that some human beings have the right to make property out of others; since the competent have nothing to gain from the incompetent, it means the right of the incompetent to own their betters and to use them as productive cattle. Whoever regards this as human and right, has no right to the title of ‘human.’

“The source of property rights is the law of causality. All property and all forms of wealth are produced by man’s mind and labor. As you cannot have effects without causes, so you cannot have wealth without its source: without intelligence. You cannot force intelligence to work: those who’re able to think, will not work under compulsion; those who will, won’t produce much more than the price of the whip needed to keep them enslaved. You cannot obtain the products of a mind except on the owner’s terms, by trade and by volitional consent. Any other policy of men toward man’s property is the policy of criminals, no matter what their numbers. Criminals are savages who play it short-range and starve when their prey runs out—just as you’re starving today, you who believed that crime could be ‘practical’ if your government decreed that robbery was legal and resistance to robbery illegal.

“The only proper purpose of a government is to protect man’s rights, which means: to protect him from physical violence. A proper government is only a policeman, acting as an agent of man’s self-defense, and, as such, may resort to force *only* against those who start the use of force. The only proper functions of a government are: the police, to protect you from criminals; the army, to protect you from foreign invaders; and the courts, to protect your property and contracts from breach or fraud by others, to settle disputes by rational rules, according to *objective* law. But a government that *initiates* the employment of force against men who had forced no one, the employment of armed compulsion against disarmed victims, is a nightmare infernal machine designed to annihilate morality: such a government reverses its only moral purpose and switches from the role of protector to the role of man’s deadliest enemy, from the role of policeman to the role of a criminal vested with the right to the wielding of violence against victims deprived of the right of self-defense. Such a government substitutes for morality the following rule of social conduct: you may do whatever you please to your neighbor, provided your gang is bigger than his.

“Only a brute, a fool or an evader can agree to exist on such terms or agree to give his fellow men a blank check on his life and his mind, to accept the belief

that others have the right to dispose of his person at their whim, that the will of the majority is omnipotent, that the physical force of muscles and numbers is a substitute for justice, reality and truth. We, the men of the mind, we who are traders, not masters or slaves, do not deal in blank checks or grant them. We do not live or work with any form of the non-objective.

“So long as men, in the era of savagery, had no concept of objective reality and believed that physical nature was ruled by the whim of unknowable demons—no thought, no science, no production were possible. Only when men discovered that nature was a firm, predictable absolute were they able to rely on their knowledge, to choose their course, to plan their future and, slowly, to rise from the cave. Now you have placed modern industry, with its immense complexity of scientific precision, back into the power of unknowable demons—the unpredictable power of the arbitrary whims of hidden, ugly little bureaucrats. A farmer will not invest the effort of one summer if he’s unable to calculate his chances of a harvest. But you expect industrial giants—who plan in terms of decades, invest in terms of generations and undertake ninety-nine-year contracts—to continue to function and produce, not knowing what random caprice in the skull of what random official will descend upon them at what moment to demolish the whole of their effort. Drifters and physical laborers live and plan by the range of a day. The better the mind, the longer the range. A man whose vision extends to a shanty, might continue to build on your quicksands, to grab a fast profit and run. A man who envisions skyscrapers, will not. Nor will he give ten years of unswerving devotion to the task of inventing a new product, when he knows that gangs of entrenched mediocrity are juggling the laws against him, to tie him, restrict him and force him to fail, but should he fight them and struggle and succeed, they will seize his rewards and his invention.

“Look past the range of the moment, you who cry that you fear to compete with men of superior intelligence, that their mind is a threat to your livelihood, that the strong leave no chance to the weak in a market of voluntary trade. What determines the material value of your work? Nothing but the productive effort of your mind—if you lived on a desert island. The less efficient the thinking of your brain, the less your physical labor would bring you—and you could spend your life on a single routine, collecting a precarious harvest or hunting with bow and arrows, unable to think any further. But when you live in a rational society, where men are free to trade, you receive an incalculable bonus: the material value of your work is determined not only by your effort, but by the effort of the best productive minds who exist in the world around you.

“When you work in a modern factory, you are paid, not only for your labor, but for all the productive genius which has made that factory possible: for the

work of the industrialist who built it, for the work of the investor who saved the money to risk on the untried and the new, for the work of the engineer who designed the machines of which you are pushing the levers, for the work of the inventor who created the product which you spend your time on making, for the work of the scientist who discovered the laws that went into the making of that product, for the work of the philosopher who taught men how to think and whom you spend your time denouncing.

“The machine, the frozen form of a living intelligence, is the power that expands the potential of your life by raising the productivity of your time. If you worked as a blacksmith in the mystics’ Middle Ages, the whole of your earning capacity would consist of an iron bar produced by your hands in days and days of effort. How many tons of rail do you produce per day if you work for Hank Rearden? Would you dare to claim that the size of your pay check was created solely by your physical labor and that those rails were the product of your muscles? The standard of living of that blacksmith is all that your muscles are worth; the rest is a gift from Hank Rearden.

“Every man is free to rise as far as he’s able or willing, but it’s only the degree to which he thinks that determines the degree to which he’ll rise. Physical labor as such can extend no further than the range of the moment. The man who does no more than physical labor, consumes the material value-equivalent of his own contribution to the process of production, and leaves no further value, neither for himself nor others. But the man who produces an idea in any field of rational endeavor—the man who discovers new knowledge—is the permanent benefactor of humanity. Material products can’t be shared, they belong to some ultimate consumer; it is only the value of an idea that can be shared with unlimited numbers of men, making all sharers richer at no one’s sacrifice or loss, raising the productive capacity of whatever labor they perform. It is the value of his own time that the strong of the intellect transfers to the weak, letting them work on the jobs he discovered, while devoting his time to further discoveries. This is mutual trade to mutual advantage; the interests of the mind are one, no matter what the degree of intelligence, among men who desire to work and don’t seek or expect the unearned.

“In proportion to the mental energy he spent, the man who creates a new invention receives but a small percentage of his value in terms of material payment, no matter what fortune he makes, no matter what millions he earns. But the man who works as a janitor in the factory producing that invention, receives an enormous payment in proportion to the mental effort that his job requires of *him*. And the same is true of all men between, on all levels of ambition and ability. The man at the top of the intellectual pyramid contributes

the most to all those below him, but gets nothing except his material payment, receiving no intellectual bonus from others to add to the value of his time. The man at the bottom who, left to himself, would starve in his hopeless ineptitude, contributes nothing to those above him, but receives the bonus of all of their brains. Such is the nature of the ‘competition’ between the strong and the weak of the intellect. Such is the pattern of ‘exploitation’ for which you have damned the strong.

“Such was the service we had given you and were glad and willing to give. What did we ask in return? Nothing but freedom. We required that you leave us free to function—free to think and to work as we choose—free to take our own risks and to bear our own losses—free to earn our own profits and to make our own fortunes—free to gamble on *your* rationality, to submit our products to your judgment for the purpose of a voluntary trade, to rely on the objective value of our work and on your mind’s ability to see it—free to count on your intelligence and honesty, and to deal with nothing but your mind. Such was the price we asked, which you chose to reject as too high. You decided to call it unfair that we, who had dragged you out of your hovels and provided you with modern apartments, with radios, movies and cars, should own our palaces and yachts—you decided that *you* had a right to your wages, but *we* had no right to our profits, that you did not want us to deal with your mind, but to deal, instead, with your gun. Our answer to *that*, was: ‘May you be damned!’ Our answer came true. You are.

“You did not care to compete in terms of intelligence—you are now competing in terms of brutality. You did not care to allow rewards to be won by successful production—you are now running a race in which rewards are won by successful plunder. You called it selfish and cruel that men should trade value for value—you have now established an unselfish society where they trade extortion for extortion. Your system is a legal civil war, where men gang up on one another and struggle for possession of the law, which they use as a club over rivals, till another gang wrests it from their clutch and clubs them with it in their turn, all of them clamoring protestations of service to an unnamed public’s unspecified good. You had said that you saw no difference between economic and political power, between the power of money and the power of guns—no difference between reward and punishment, no difference between purchase and plunder, no difference between pleasure and fear, no difference between life and death. You are learning the difference now.

“Some of you might plead the excuse of your ignorance, of a limited mind and a limited range. But the damned and the guiltiest among you are the men who *had* the capacity to know, yet chose to blank out reality, the men who were

willing to sell their intelligence into cynical servitude to force: the contemptible breed of those mystics of science who profess a devotion to some sort of 'pure knowledge'.—the purity consisting of their claim that such knowledge has no practical purpose on this earth—who reserve their logic for inanimate matter, but believe that the subject of dealing with men requires and deserves no rationality, who scorn money and sell their souls in exchange for a laboratory supplied by loot. And since there is no such thing as 'non-practical knowledge' or any sort of 'disinterested' action, since they scorn the use of their science for the purpose and profit of life, they deliver their science to the service of death, to the only practical purpose it can ever have for looters: to inventing weapons of coercion and destruction. They, the intellects who seek escape from moral values, *they* are the damned on this earth, *theirs* is the guilt beyond forgiveness. Do you hear me, Dr. Robert Stadler?

"But it is not to him that I wish to speak. I am speaking to those among you who have retained some sovereign shred of their soul, unsold and unstamped: '—to the order of others.' If, in the chaos of the motives that have made you listen to the radio tonight, there was an honest, *rational* desire to learn what is wrong with the world, you are the man whom I wished to address. By the rules and terms of my code, one owes a rational statement to those whom it does concern and who're making an effort to know. Those who're making an effort to fail to understand me, are not a concern of mine.

"I am speaking to those who desire to live and to recapture the honor of their soul. Now that you know the truth about your world, *stop supporting your own destroyers*. The evil of the world is made possible by nothing but the sanction you give it. Withdraw your sanction. Withdraw your support. Do not try to live on your enemies' terms or to win at a game where they're setting the rules. Do not seek the favor of those who enslaved you, do not beg for alms from those who have robbed you, be it subsidies, loans or jobs, do not join their team to recoup what they've taken by helping them rob your neighbors. One cannot hope to maintain one's life by accepting bribes to condone one's destruction. Do not struggle for profit, success or security at the price of a lien on your right to exist. Such a lien is not to be paid off; the more you pay them, the more they will demand; the greater the values you seek or achieve, the more vulnerably helpless you become. Theirs is a system of *white blackmail* devised to bleed you, not by means of your sins, but by means of your love for existence.

"Do not attempt to rise on the looters' terms or to climb a ladder while they're holding the ropes. Do not allow their hands to touch the only power that keeps them in power: your living ambition. Go on strike—in the manner I did. Use your mind and skill in private, extend your knowledge, develop your ability, but

do not share your achievements with others. Do not try to produce a fortune, with a looter riding on your back. Stay on the lowest rung of their ladder, earn no more than your barest survival, do not make an extra penny to support the looters' state. Since you're captive, act as a captive, do not help them pretend that you're free. Be the silent, incorruptible enemy they dread. When they force you, obey—but *do not volunteer*. Never volunteer a step in their direction, or a wish, or a plea, or a purpose. Do not help a holdup man to claim that he acts as your friend and benefactor. Do not help your jailers to pretend that their jail is your natural state of existence. Do not help them to fake reality. That fake is the only dam holding off their secret terror, the terror of knowing they're unfit to exist; remove it and let them drown; your sanction is their only life belt.

"If you find a chance to vanish into some wilderness out of their reach, do so, but not to exist as a bandit or to create a gang competing with their racket; build a productive life of your own with those who accept your moral code and are willing to struggle for a human existence. You have no chance to win on the Morality of Death or by the code of faith and force; raise a standard to which the honest *will* repair: the standard of Life and Reason.

"Act as a rational being and aim at becoming a rallying point for all those who are starved for a voice of integrity—act on your rational values, whether alone in the midst of your enemies, or with a few of your chosen friends, or as the founder of a modest community on the frontier of mankind's rebirth.

"When the looters' state collapses, deprived of the best of its slaves, when it falls to a level of impotent chaos, like the mystic-ridden nations of the Orient, and dissolves into starving robber gangs fighting to rob one another—when the advocates of the morality of sacrifice perish with their final ideal—then and on that day we will return.

"We will open the gates of our city to those who deserve to enter, a city of smokestacks, pipe lines, orchards, markets and inviolate homes. We will act as the rallying center for such hidden outposts as you'll build. With the sign of the dollar as our symbol—the sign of free trade and free minds—we will move to reclaim this country once more from the impotent savages who never discovered its nature, its meaning, its splendor. Those who choose to join us, will join us; those who don't, will not have the power to stop us; hordes of savages have never been an obstacle to men who carried the banner of the mind.

"Then this country will once more become a sanctuary for a vanishing species: the rational being. The political system we will build is contained in a single moral premise: no man may obtain any values from others by resorting to physical force. Every man will stand or fall, live or die by his rational judgment. If he fails to use it and falls, he will be his only victim. If he fears that his

judgment is inadequate, he will not be given a gun to improve it. If he chooses to correct his errors in time, he will have the unobstructed example of his betters, for guidance in learning to think; but an end will be put to the infamy of paying with one life for the errors of another.

“In that world, you’ll be able to rise in the morning with the spirit you had known in your childhood: that spirit of eagerness, adventure and certainty which comes from dealing with a rational universe. No child is afraid of nature; it is your fear of men that will vanish, the fear that has stunted your soul, the fear you acquired in your early encounters with the incomprehensible, the unpredictable, the contradictory, the arbitrary, the hidden, the faked, *the irrational* in men. You will live in a world of responsible beings, who will be as consistent and reliable as facts; the guarantee of their character will be a system of existence where objective reality is the standard and the judge. Your virtues will be given protection, your vices and weaknesses will not. Every chance will be open to your good, none will be provided for your evil. What you’ll receive from men will not be alms, or pity, or mercy, or forgiveness of sins, but a single value: *justice*. And when you’ll look at men or at yourself, you will feel, not disgust, suspicion and guilt, but a single constant: *respect*.

“Such is the future you are capable of winning. It requires a struggle ; so does any human value. All life is a purposeful struggle, and your only choice is the choice of a goal. Do you wish to continue the battle of your present or do you wish to fight for my world? Do you wish to continue a struggle that consists of clinging to precarious ledges in a sliding descent to the abyss, a struggle where the hardships you endure are irreversible and the victories you win bring you closer to destruction? Or do you wish to undertake a struggle that consists of rising from ledge to ledge in a steady ascent to the top, a struggle where the hardships are investments in your future, and the victories bring you irreversibly closer to the world of your moral ideal, and should you die without reaching full sunlight, you will die on a level touched by its rays? Such is the choice before you. Let your mind and your love of existence decide.

“The last of my words will be addressed to those heroes who might still be hidden in the world, those who are held prisoner, not by their evasions, but by their virtues and their desperate courage. My brothers in spirit, check on your virtues and on the nature of the enemies you’re serving. Your destroyers hold you by means of your endurance, your generosity, your innocence, your love—the endurance that carries their burdens—the generosity that responds to their cries of despair—the innocence that is unable to conceive of their evil and gives them the benefit of every doubt, refusing to condemn them without understanding and incapable of understanding such motives as theirs—the love,

your love of life, which makes you believe that they are men and that they love it, too. But the world of today is the world they wanted; life is the object of their hatred. Leave them to the death they worship. In the name of your magnificent devotion to this earth, leave them, don't exhaust the greatness of your soul on achieving the triumph of the evil of theirs. Do you hear me . . . my love?

"In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this world to those who are its worst. In the name of the values that keep you alive, do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, the mindless in those who have never achieved his title. Do not lose your knowledge that man's proper estate is an upright posture, an intransigent mind and a step that travels unlimited roads. Do not let your fire go out, spark by irreplaceable spark, in the hopeless swamps of the approximate, the not-quite, the not-yet, the not-at-all. Do not let the hero in your soul perish, in lonely frustration for the life you deserved, but have never been able to reach. Check your road and the nature of your battle. The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it's yours.

"But to win it requires your total dedication and a total break with the world of your past, with the doctrine that man is a sacrificial animal who exists for the pleasure of others. Fight for the value of your person. Fight for the virtue of your pride. Fight for the essence of that which is man: for his sovereign rational mind. Fight with the radiant certainty and the absolute rectitude of knowing that yours is the Morality of Life and that yours is the battle for any achievement, any value, any grandeur, any goodness, any joy that has ever existed on this earth.

"You will win when you are ready to pronounce the oath I have taken at the start of my battle—and for those who wish to know the day of my return, I shall now repeat it to the hearing of the world:

"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."

lass="calibre">

CHAPTER X

IN THE NAME OF THE BEST WITHIN US

Dagny walked straight toward the guard who stood at the door of “Project F.” Her steps sounded purposeful, even and open, ringing in the silence of the path among the trees. She raised her head to a ray of moonlight, to let him recognize her face.

“Let me in,” she said.

“No admittance,” he answered in the voice of a robot. “By order of Dr. Ferris.”

“I am here by order of Mr. Thompson.”

“Huh? ... I ... I don’t know about that.”

“I do.”

“I mean, Dr. Ferris hasn’t told me ... ma.‘am.”

“I am telling you.”

“But I’m not supposed to take any orders from anyone excepting Dr. Ferris.”

“Do you wish to disobey Mr. Thompson?”

“Oh, no, ma.‘am! But ... but if Dr. Ferris said to let nobody in, that means nobody—” He added uncertainly and pleadingly, “—doesn’t it?”

“Do you know that I am Dagny Taggart and that you’ve seen my pictures in the papers with Mr. Thompson and all the top leaders of the country?”

“Yes, ma.‘am.”

“Then decide whether you wish to disobey their orders.”

“Oh, no, ma.‘am! I don’.t!”

“Then let me in.”

“But I can’t disobey Dr. Ferris, either!”

“Then choose.”

“But I can’t choose, ma.‘am! Who am I to choose?”

“You’ll have to.”

“Look,” he said hastily, pulling a key from his pocket and turning to the door, “I’ll ask the chief. He—”

“No,” she said.

Some quality in the tone of her voice made him whirl back to her: she was holding a gun pointed levelly at his heart.

“Listen carefully,” she said. “Either you let me in or I shoot you. You may try

to shoot me first, if you can. You have that choice—and no other. Now decide.”

His mouth fell open and the key dropped from his hand.

“Get out of my way,” she said.

He shook his head frantically, pressing his back against the door. “Oh Christ, ma.‘am!” he gulped in the whine of a desperate plea. “I can’t shoot at you, seeing as you come from Mr. Thompson! And I can’t let you in against the word of Dr. Ferris! What am I to do? I’m only a little fellow! I’m only obeying orders! It’s not up to me!”

“It’s your life,” she said.

“If you let me ask the chief, he’ll tell me, he.‘ll—”

“I won’t let you ask anyone.”

“But how do I know that you *really* have an order from Mr. Thompson?”

“You don’t. Maybe I haven’t. Maybe I’m acting on my own—and you’ll be punished for obeying me. Maybe I have—and you’ll be thrown in jail for disobeying. Maybe Dr. Ferris and Mr. Thompson agree about this. Maybe they don.‘t—and you have to defy one or the other. These are the things you have to decide. There is no one to ask, no one to call, no one to tell you. You will have to decide them yourself.”

“But I *can*’t decide! Why me?”

“Because it’s *your* body that’s barring my way.”

“But I can’t decide! I’m not *supposed* to decide!”

“I’ll count to three,” she said. “Then I’ll shoot.”

“Wait! Wait! I haven’t said yes or no!” he cried, cringing tighter against the door, as if immobility of mind and body were his best protection.

“One—” she counted; she could see his eyes staring at her in terror —“Two —” she could see that the gun held less terror for him than the alternative she offered—“Three.”

Calmly and impersonally, she, who would have hesitated to fire at an animal, pulled the trigger and fired straight at the heart of a man who had wanted to exist without the responsibility of consciousness.

Her gun was equipped with a silencer; there was no sound to attract anyone’s attention, only the thud of a body falling at her feet.

She picked up the key from the ground—then waited for a few brief moments, as had been agreed upon.

Francisco was first to join her, coming from behind a corner of the building, then Hank Rearden, then Ragnar Danneskjöld. There had been four guards posted at intervals among the trees, around the building. They were now disposed of: one was dead, three were left in the brush, bound and gagged.

She handed the key to Francisco without a word. He unlocked the door and

went in, alone, leaving the door open to the width of an inch. The three others waited outside, by that opening.

The hall was lighted by a single naked bulb stuck in the middle of the ceiling. A guard stood at the foot of the stairs leading to the second floor.

"Who are you?" he cried at the sight of Francisco entering as if he owned the place. "Nobody's supposed to come in here tonight!"

"I did," said Francisco.

"Why did Rusty let you in?"

"He must have had his reasons."

"He wasn't supposed to!"

"Somebody has changed your suppositions." Francisco's eyes were taking a lightning inventory of the place. A second guard stood on the landing at the turn of the stairs, looking down at them and listening.

"What's your business?"

"Copper-mining."

"Huh? I mean, who are you?"

"The name's too long to tell you. I'll tell it to your chief. Where is he?"

"*I'm* asking the questions!" But he backed a step away. "Don't ... don't you act like a big shot or I'll—"

"Hey, Pete, he *is*!" cried the second guard, paralyzed by Francisco's manner.

The first one was struggling to ignore it; his voice grew louder with the growth of his fear, as he snapped at Francisco, "What are you after?"

"I said I'll tell it to your chief. Where is he?"

"I'm asking the questions!"

"I'm not answering them."

"Oh, you're not, are you?" snarled Pete, who had but one recourse when in doubt: his hand jerked to the gun on his hip.

Francisco's hand was too fast for the two men to see its motion, and his gun was too silent. What they saw and heard next was the gun flying out of Pete's hand, along with a splatter of blood from his shattered fingers, and his muffled howl of pain. He collapsed, groaning. In the instant when the second guard grasped it, he saw that Francisco's gun was aimed at him.

"Don't shoot, mister!" he cried.

"Come down here with your hands up," ordered Francisco, holding his gun aimed with one hand and waving a signal to the crack of the door with the other.

By the time the guard descended the stairs, Rearden was there to disarm him, and Danneskjöld to tie his hands and feet. The sight of Dagny seemed to frighten him more than the rest; he could not understand it: the three men wore caps and

windbreakers, and, but for their manner, could be taken for a gang of highwaymen; the presence of a lady was inexplicable.

“Now,” said Francisco, “where is your chief?”

The guard jerked his head in the direction of the stairs. “Up there.”

“How many guards are there in the building?”

“Nine.”

“Where are they?”

“One’s on the cellar stairs. The others are all up there.”

“Where?”

“In the big laboratory. The one with the window.”

“All of them?”

“Yes.”

“What are these rooms?” He pointed at the doors leading off the hall.

“They’re labs, too. They’re locked for the night.”

“Who’s got the key?”

“Him.” He jerked his head at Pete.

Rearden and Danneskjöld took the key from Pete’s pocket and hurried soundlessly to check the rooms, while Francisco continued, “Are there any other men in the building?”

“No.”

“Isn’t there a prisoner here?”

“Oh ... yeah, I guess so. There must be, or they wouldn’t’ve kept us all on duty.”

“Is he still here?”

“That, I don’t know. They’d never tell us.”

“Is Dr. Ferris here?”

“No. He left ten-fifteen minutes ago.”

“Now, that laboratory upstairs—does it open right on the stair landing?”

“Yes.”

“How many doors are there?”

“Three. It’s the one in the middle.”

“What are the other rooms?”

“There’s the small laboratory on one side and Dr. Ferris’ office on the other.”

“Are there connecting doors between them?”

“Yes.”

Francisco was turning to his companions, when the guard said pleadingly, “Mister, can I ask you a question?”

“Go ahead.”

“Who are you?”

He answered in the solemn tone of a drawing-room introduction, “Francisco Domingo Carlos Andres Sebastián d. ‘Anconia.’”

He left the guard gaping at him and turned to a brief, whispered consultation with his companions.

In a moment, it was Rearden who went up the stairs—swiftly, soundlessly and alone.

Cages containing rats and guinea pigs were stacked against the walls of the laboratory; they had been put there by the guards who were playing poker on the long laboratory table in the center. Six of them were playing; two were standing in opposite corners, watching the entrance door, guns in hand. It was Rearden’s face that saved him from being shot on sight when he entered: his face was too well known to them and too unexpected. He saw eight heads staring at him with recognition and with inability to believe what they were recognizing.

He stood at the door, his hands in the pockets of his trousers, with the casual, confident manner of a business executive.

“Who is in charge here?” he asked in the politely abrupt voice of a man who does not waste time.

“You ... you’re not ...” stammered a lanky, surly individual at the card table.

“I’m Hank Rearden. Are you the chief?”

“Yeah! But where in blazes do you come from?”

“From New York.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Then, I take it, you have not been notified.”

“Should I have ... I mean, about *what*?” The swift, touchy, resentful suspicion that his superiors had slighted his authority, was obvious in the chief’s voice. He was a tall, emaciated man, with jerky movements, a sallow face and the restless, unfocused eyes of a drug addict.

“About my business here.”

“You ... you can’t have any business here,” he snapped, torn between the fear of a bluff and the fear of having been left out of some important, top-level decision. “Aren’t you a traitor and a deserter and a—”

“I see that you’re behind the times, my good man.”

The seven others in the room were staring at Rearden with an awed, superstitious uncertainty. The two who held guns still held them aimed at him in the impassive manner of automatons. He did not seem to take notice of them.

“What is it you say is your business here?” snapped the chief.

“I am here to take charge of the prisoner whom you are to deliver to me.”

“If you came from headquarters, you’d know that I’m not supposed to know anything about any prisoner—and that nobody is to touch him!”

“Except me.”

The chief leaped to his feet, darted to a telephone and seized the receiver. He had not raised it halfway to his ear when he dropped it abruptly with a gesture that sent a vibration of p he had had time to hear that the telephone was dead and to know that the wires were cut.

His look of accusation, as he whirled to Rearden, broke against the faintly contemptuous reproof of Rearden’s voice: “That’s no way to guard a building—if *this* is what you allowed to happen. Better let me have the prisoner, before anything happens to him—if you don’t want me to report you for negligence, as well as insubordination.”

The chief dropped heavily back on his chair, slumped forward across the table and looked up at Rearden with a glance that made his emaciated face resemble the animals that were beginning to stir in the cages.

“Who is the prisoner?” he asked.

“My good man,” said Rearden, “if your immediate superiors did not see fit to tell you, I certainly will not.”

“They didn’t see fit to tell me about your coming here, either!” yelled the chief, his voice confessing the helplessness of anger and broadcasting the vibrations of impotence to his men. “How do I know you’re on the level? With the phone out of order, who’s going to tell me? How am I to know what to do?”

“That’s *your* problem, not mine.”

“I don’t believe you!” His cry was too shrill to project conviction. “I don’t believe that the government would send you on a mission, when you’re one of those vanishing traitors and friends of John Galt who—”

“But haven’t you heard?”

“What?”

“John Galt has made a deal with the government and has brought us all back.”

“Oh, thank God!” cried one of the guards, the youngest.

“Shut your mouth! You’re not to have any political opinions!” snapped the chief, and jerked back to Rearden. “Why hasn’t it been announced on the radio?”

“Do you presume to hold opinions on when and how the government should choose to announce its policies?”

In the long moment of silence, they could hear the rustle of the animals clawing at the bars of their cages.

“I think I should remind you,” said Rearden, “that your job is not to question orders, but to obey them, that you are not to know or understand the policies of your superiors, that you are not to judge, to choose or to doubt.”

“But I don’t know whether I’m supposed to obey *you*!”

“If you refuse, you’ll take the consequences.”

.Crouching against the table, the chief moved his glance slowly, ap praisingly, from Rearden's face to the two gunmen in the corners. The gunmen steadied their aim by an almost imperceptible movement. A nervous rustle went through the room. An animal squeaked shrilly in one of the cages.

"I think I should also tell you," said Rearden, his voice faintly harder, "that I am not alone. My friends are waiting outside."

"Where?"

"All around this room."

"How many?"

"You'll find out—one way or the other."

"Say, Chief," moaned a shaky voice from among the guards, "we don't want to tangle with *those* people, they. 're—"

"Shut up!" roared the chief, leaping to his feet and brandishing his gun in the direction of the speaker. "You're not going to turn yellow on me, any of you bastards!" He was screaming to ward off the knowledge that they had. He was swaying on the edge of panic, fighting against the realization that something somehow had disarmed his men. "There's nothing to be scared of!" He was screaming it to himself, struggling to recapture the safety of his only sphere: the sphere of violence. "Nothing and nobody! I'll show you!" He whirled around, his hand shaking at the end of his sweeping arm, and fired at Rearden.

Some of them saw Rearden sway, his right hand gripping his left shoulder. Others, in the same instant, saw the gun drop out of the chief's hand and hit the floor in time with his scream and with the .spurt of blood from his wrist. Then all of them saw Francisco d.'An conia standing at the door on the left, his soundless gun still aimed at the chief.

All of them were on their feet and had drawn their guns, but they lost that first moment, not daring to fire.

"I wouldn.'t, if I were you," said Francisco.

"Jesus!" gasped one of the guards, struggling for the memory of a name he could not recapture. "That's ... that's the guy who blew up all the copper mines in the world!"

"It is," said Rearden.

They had been backing involuntarily away from Francisco—and turned to see that Rearden still stood at the entrance door, with a pointed gun in his right hand and a dark stain spreading on his left shoulder.

"Shoot, you bastards!" screamed the chief to the wavering men. "What are you waiting for? Shoot them down!" He was leaning with one arm against the table, blood running out of the other. "I'll report any man who doesn't fight! I'll have him sentenced to death for it!"

“Drop your guns,” said Rearden.

The seven guards stood frozen for an instant, obeying neither.

“Let me out of here!” screamed the youngest, dashing for the door on the right.

He threw the door open and sprang back: Dagny Taggart stood on the threshold, gun in hand.

The guards were drawing slowly to the center of the room, fighting an invisible battle in the fog of their minds, disarmed by a sense of unreality in the presence of the legendary figures they had never expected to see, feeling almost as if they were ordered to fire at ghosts.

“Drop your guns,” said Rearden. “You don’t know why you’re here. We do. You don’t know who your prisoner is. We do. You don’t know why your bosses want you to guard him. We know why we want to get him out. You don’t know the purpose of your fight. We know the purpose of ours. If you die, you won’t know what you’re dying for. If we do, we will.”

“Don’t ... don’t listen to him!” snarled the chief. “Shoot! I order you to shoot!”

One of the guards looked at the chief, dropped his gun and, raising his arms, backed away from the group toward Rearden.

“God damn you!” yelled the chief, seized a gun with his left hand and fired at the deserter.

In time with the fall of the man’s body, the window burst into a shower of glass—and from the limb of a tree, as from a catapult, the tall, slender figure of a man flew into the room, landed on its feet and fired at the first guard in reach.

“Who are *you*?” screamed some terror-blinded voice.

“Ragnar Danneskjöld.”

Three sounds answered him: a long, swelling moan of panic—the clatter of four guns dropped to the floor—and the bark of the fifth, fired by a guard at the forehead of the chief.

By the time the four survivors of the garrison began to reassemble the pieces of their consciousness, their figures were stretched on the floor, bound and gagged; the fifth one was left standing, his hands tied behind his back.

“Where is the prisoner?” Francisco asked him.

“In the cellar ... I guess.”

“Who has the key?”

“Dr. Ferris.”

“Where are the stairs to the cellar?”

“Behind a door in Dr. Ferris’ office.”

“Lead the way.”

As they started, Francisco turned to Rearden. "Are you all right, Hank?"

"Sure."

"Need to rest?"

"Hell, no!"

From the threshold of a door in Ferris' office, they looked down a steep flight of stone stairs and saw a guard on the landing below.

"Come here with your hands up!" ordered Francisco.

The guard saw the silhouette of a resolute stranger and the glint of a gun: it was enough. He obeyed immediately; he seemed relieved to escape from the damp stone crypt. He was left tied on the floor of the office, along with the guard who had led them.

Then the four rescuers were free to fly down the stairs to the locked steel door at the bottom. They had acted and moved with the precision of a controlled discipline. Now, it was as if their inner reins had broken.

Danneskjöld had the tools to smash the lock. Francisco was first to enter the cellar, and his arm barred Dagny's way for the fraction of a second—for the length of a look to make certain that the sight was bearable—then he let her rush past him: beyond the tangle of electric wires, he had seen Galt's lifted head and glance of greeting.

She fell down on her knees by the side of the mattress. Galt looked up at her, as he had looked on their first morning in the valley, his smile was like the sound of a laughter that had never been touched by pain, his voice was soft and low:

"We never had to take any of it seriously, did we?"

Tears running down her face, but her smile declaring a full, confident, radiant certainty, she answered, "No, we never had to."

Rearden and Danneskjöld were cutting his bonds. Francisco held a flask of brandy to Galt's lips. Galt drank, and raised himself to lean on an elbow when his arms were free. "Give me a cigarette," he said.

Francisco produced a package of dollar-sign cigarettes. Galt's hand shook a little, as he held a cigarette to the flame of a lighter, but Francisco's hand shook much more.

Glancing at his eyes over the flame, Galt smiled and said in the tone of an answer to the questions Francisco was not asking, "Yes, it was pretty bad, but bearable—and the kind of voltage they used leaves no damage."

"I'll find them some day, whoever they were ..." said Francisco; the tone of his voice, flat, dead and barely audible, said the rest.

"If you do, you'll find that there's nothing left of them to kill."

Galt glanced at the faces around him; he saw the intensity of the relief in their eyes and the violence of the anger in the grimness of their features; he knew in

what manner they were now reliving his torture. .

“It’s over,” he said. “Don’t make it worse for yourself than it was for me.”

Francisco turned his face away. “It’s only that it was you ...” he whispered, “you ... if it were anyone but you ...”

“But it had to be me, if they were to try their last, and they’ve tried, and”—he moved his hand, sweeping the room—and the meaning of those who had made it—into the wastelands of the past—“and that’s that.”

Francisco nodded, his face still turned away; the violent grip of his fingers clutching Galt’s wrist for a moment was his answer.

Galt lifted himself to a sitting posture, slowly regaining control of his muscles. He glanced up at Dagny’s face, as her arm shot forward to help him; he saw the struggle of her smile against the tension of her resisted tears; it was the struggle of her knowledge that nothing could matter beside the sight of his naked body and that this body was living -against her knowledge of what it had endured. Holding her glance, he raised his hand and touched the collar of her white sweater with his fingertips, in acknowledgment and in reminder of the only things that were to matter from now on. The faint tremor of her lips, relaxing into a smile, told him that she understood.

Danneskjöld found Galt’s shirt, slacks and the rest of his clothing, which had been thrown on the floor in a corner of the room. “Do you think you can walk, John?” he asked.

“Sure.”

While Francisco and Rearden were helping Galt to dress, Danneskjöld proceeded calmly, systematically, with no visible emotion, to demolish the torture machine into splinters.

Galt was not fully steady on his feet, but he could stand, leaning on Francisco’s shoulder. The first few steps were hard, but by the time they reached the door, he was able to resume the motions of walking. His one arm encircled Francisco’s shoulders for support; his other arm held Dagny’s shoulders, both to gain support and to give it.

They did not speak as they walked down the hill, with the darkness of the trees closing in about them for protection, cutting off the dead glow of the moon and the deader glow in the distance behind them, in the windows of the State Science Institute.

Francisco’s airplane was hidden in the brush, on the edge of a meadow beyond the next hill. There were no human habitations for miles around them. There were no eyes to notice or to question the sudden streaks of the airplane’s headlights shooting across the desolation of dead weeds, and the violent burst of the motor brought to life by Danneskjöld, who took the wheel.

With the sound of the door slamming shut behind them and the forward thrust of the wheels under their feet, Francisco smiled for the first time.

"This is my one and only chance to give you orders," he said, helping Galt to stretch out in a reclining chair. "Now lie still, relax and take it easy ... You, too," he added, turning to Dagny and pointing at the seat by Galt's side.

The wheels were running faster, as if gaining speed and purpose and lightness, ignoring the impotent obstacles of small jolts from the ruts of the ground. When the motion turned to a long, smooth streak, when they saw the dark shapes of the trees sweeping down and dropping past their windows, Galt leaned silently over and pressed his lips to Dagny's hand: he was leaving the outer world with the one value he had wanted to win from it.

Francisco had produced a first-aid kit and was removing Rearden's shirt to bandage his wound. Galt saw the thin red trickle running from Rearden's shoulder down his chest.

"Thank you, Hank," he said.

Rearden smiled. "I will repeat what you said when I thanked you, on our first meeting: 'If you understand that I acted for my own sake, you know that no gratitude is required.' "

"I will repeat," said Galt, "the answer you gave me: '*That* is why I thank you.' "

Dagny noticed that they looked at each other as if their glance were the handshake of a bond too firm to require any statement. Rearden saw her watching them—and the faintest contraction of his eyes was like a smile of sanction, as if his glance were repeating to her the message he had sent her from the valley.

They heard the sudden sound of Danneskjöld's voice raised cheerfully in conversation with empty space, and they realized that he was speaking over the plane's radio: "Yes, safe and sound, all of us.... Yes, he's unhurt, just shaken a little, and resting.... No, no permanent injury.... Yes, we're all here. Hank Rearden got a flesh wound, but"—he glanced over his shoulder—"but he's grinning at me right now.... Losses? I think we lost our temper for a few minutes back there, but we're recovering.... Don't try to beat me to Galt's Gulch, I'll land first—and I'll help Kay in the restaurant to fix your breakfast."

"Can any outsiders hear him?" asked Dagny.

"No," said Francisco. "It's a frequency they're not equipped to get."

"Whom is he talking to?" asked Galt.

"To about half the male population of the valley," said Francisco, "or as many as we had space for on every plane available. They are flying behind us right now. Did you think any of them would stay home and leave you in the hands of

the looters? We were prepared to get you by open, armed assault on that Institute or on the Wayne-Falkland, if necessary. But we knew that in such case we would run the risk of their killing you when they saw that they were beaten. That's why we decided that the four of us would first try it alone. Had we failed, the others would have proceeded with an open attack. They were waiting, half a mile away. We had men posted among the trees on the hill, who saw us get out and relayed the word to the others. Ellis Wyatt was in charge. Incidentally, he's flying your plane. The reason we couldn't get to New Hampshire as fast as Dr. Ferris, is that we had to get our planes from distant, hidden landing places, while he had the advantage of open airports. Which, incidentally, he won't have much longer."

"No," said Galt, "not much longer."

"That was our only obstacle. The rest was easy. I'll tell you the whole story later. Anyway, the four of us were all that was necessary to beat their garrison."

"One of these centuries," said Danneskjöld, turning to them for a moment, "the brutes, private or public, who believe that they can rule their betters by force, will learn the lesson of what happens when brute force encounters mind and force."

"They've learned it," said Galt. "Isn't that the particular lesson you have been teaching them for twelve years?"

"I? Yes. But the semester is over. Tonight was the last act of violence that I'll ever have to perform. It was my reward for the twelve years. My men have now started to build their homes in the valley. My ship is hidden where no one will find her, until I'm able to sell her for a much more civilized use. She'll be converted into a transatlantic passenger liner—an excellent one, even if of modest size. As for me, I will start getting ready to give a different course of lessons. I think I'll have to brush up on the works of our teacher's first teacher."

Rearden chuckled. "I'd like to be present at your first lecture on philosophy in a university classroom," he said. "I'd like to see how your students will be able to keep their mind on the subject and how you'll answer the sort of irrelevant questions I won't blame them for wanting to ask you."

"I will tell them that they'll find the answers in the subject."

There were not many lights on the earth below. The countryside was an empty black sheet, with a few occasional flickers in the windows of some government structures, and the trembling glow of candles in the windows of thriftless homes. Most of the rural population had long since been reduced to the life of those ages when artificial light was an exorbitant luxury, and a sunset put an end to human activity. The towns were like scattered puddles, left behind by a receding tide, still holding some precious drops of electricity, but drying out in a desert of rations, quotas, controls and power-conservation rules.

But when the place that had once been the source of the tide—New York City—rose in the distance before them, it was still extending its lights to the sky, still defying the primordial darkness, almost as if, in an ultimate effort, in a final appeal for help, it were now stretching its arms to the plane that was crossing its sky. Involuntarily, they sat up, as if at respectful attention at the deathbed of what had been greatness.

Looking down, they could see the last convulsions: the lights of the cars were darting through the streets, like animals trapped in a maze, frantically seeking an exit, the bridges were jammed with cars, the approaches to the bridges were veins of massed headlights, glittering bottlenecks stopping all motion, and the desperate screaming of sirens reached faintly to the height of the plane. The news of the continent's severed artery had now engulfed the city, men were deserting their posts, trying, in panic, to abandon New York, seeking escape where all roads were cut off and escape was no longer possible.

The plane was above the peaks of the skyscrapers when suddenly, with the abruptness of a shudder, as if the ground had parted to engulf it, the city disappeared from the face of the earth. It took them a moment to realize that the panic had reached the power stations—and that the lights of New York had gone out.

Dagny gasped. "Don't look down!" Galt ordered sharply.

She raised her eyes to his face. His face had that look of austerity with which she had always seen him meet facts.

She remembered the story Francisco had told her: "He had quit the Twentieth Century. He was living in a garret in a slum neighborhood. He stepped to the window and pointed at the skyscrapers of the city. He said that we had to extinguish the lights of the world, and when we would see the lights of New York go out, we would know that our job was done."

She thought of it when she saw the three of them—John Galt, Francisco d'Anconia, Ragnar Danneskjöld—look silently at one another for a moment.

She glanced at Rearden; he was not looking down, he was looking ahead, as she had seen him look at an untouched countryside: with a glance appraising the possibilities of action.

When she looked at the darkness ahead, another memory rose in her mind—the moment when, circling above the Afton airport, she had seen the silver body of a plane rise like a phoenix from the darkness of the earth. She knew that now, at this hour, their plane was carrying all that was left of New York City.

She looked ahead. The earth would be as empty as the space where their propeller was cutting an unobstructed path—as empty and as free. She knew what Nat Taggart had felt at his start and why now, for the first time, she was

following him in full loyalty: the confident sense of facing a void and of knowing that one has a continent to build.

She felt the whole struggle of her past rising before her and dropping away, leaving her here, on the height of this moment. She smiled—and the words in her mind, appraising and sealing the past, were the words of courage, pride and dedication, which most men had never understood, the words of a businessman's language: "Price no object."

She did not gasp and she felt no tremor when, in the darkness below, she saw a small string of lighted dots struggling slowly westward through the void, with the long, bright dash of a headlight groping to protect the safety of its way; she felt nothing, even though it was a train and she knew that it had no destination but the void.

She turned to Galt. He was watching her face, as if he had been following her thoughts. She saw the reflection of her smile in his. "It's the end," she said. "It's the beginning," he answered.

Then they lay still, leaning back in their chairs, silently looking at each other. Then their persons filled each other's awareness, as the sum and meaning of the future—but the sum included the knowledge of all that had had to be earned, before the person of another being could come to embody the value of one's existence.

New York was far behind them, when they heard Danneskjöld answer a call from the radio: "Yes, he's awake. I don't think he'll sleep tonight.... Yes, I think he can." He turned to glance over his shoulder. "John, Dr. Akston would like to speak to you."

"What? Is he on one of those planes behind us?"

"Certainly."

Galt leaped forward to seize the microphone. "Hello, Dr. Akston," he said; the quiet, low tone of his voice was the audible image of a smile transmitted through space.

"Hello, John." The too-conscious steadiness of Hugh Akston's voice confessed at what cost he had waited to learn whether he would ever pronounce these two words again. "I just wanted to hear your voice ... just to know that you're all right."

Galt chuckled and—in the tone of a student proudly presenting a completed task of homework as proof of a lesson well learned—he answered, "Of course I am all right, Professor. I had to be. A is A."

* * *

The locomotive of the eastbound Comet broke down in the middle of a desert in Arizona. It stopped abruptly, for no visible reason, like a man who had not permitted himself to know that he was bearing too much: some overstrained connection snapped for good.

When Eddie Willers called for the conductor, he waited a long time before the man came in, and he sensed the answer to his question by the look of resignation on the man's face.

"The engineer is trying to find out what's wrong, Mr. Willers," he answered softly, in a tone implying that it was his duty to hope, but that he had held no hope for years.

"He doesn't know?"

"He's working on it." The conductor waited for a polite half-minute and turned to go, but stopped to volunteer an explanation, as if some dim, rational habit told him that any attempt to explain made any unadmitted terror easier to bear. "Those Diesels of ours aren't fit to be sent out on the road, Mr. Willers. They weren't worth repairing long ago."

"I know," said Eddie Willers quietly.

The conductor sensed that his explanation was worse than none: it led to questions that men did not ask these days. He shook his head and went out.

Eddie Willers sat looking at the empty darkness beyond the window. This was the first eastbound Comet out of San Francisco in many days: she was the child of his tortured effort to re-establish transcontinental service. He could not tell what the past few days had cost him or what he had done to save the San Francisco terminal from the blind chaos of a civil war that men were fighting with no concept of their goals; there was no way to remember the deals he had made on the basis of the range of every shifting moment. He knew only that he had obtained immunity for the terminal from the leaders of three different warring factions; that he had found a man for the post of terminal manager who did not seem to have given up altogether; that he had started one more Taggart Comet on her eastward run, with the best Diesel engine and the best crew available; and that he had boarded her for his return journey to New York, with no knowledge of how long his achievement would last.

He had never had to work so hard; he had done his job as conscientiously well as he had always done any assignment; but it was as if he had worked in a vacuum, as if his energy had found no transmitters and had run into the sands of ... of some such desert as the one beyond the window of the Comet. He shuddered: he felt a moment's kinship with the stalled engine of the train.

After a while, he summoned the conductor once more. "How is it going?" he asked.

The conductor shrugged and shook his head.

“Send the fireman to a track phone. Have him tell the Division Headquarters to send us the best mechanic available.”

“Yes, sir.”

There was nothing to see beyond the window; turning off the light, Eddie Willers could distinguish a gray spread dotted by the black spots of cacti, with no start to it and no end. He wondered how men had ever ventured to cross it, and at what price, in the days when there were no trains. He jerked his head away and snapped on the light.

It was only the fact that the Comet was in exile, he thought, that gave him this sense of pressing anxiety. She was stalled on an alien rail—on the borrowed track of the Atlantic Southern that ran through Arizona, the track they were using without payment. He had to get her out of here, he thought; he would not feel like this once they returned to their own rail. But the junction suddenly seemed an insurmountable distance away: on the shore of the Mississippi, at the Taggart Bridge.

No, he thought, that was not all. He had to admit to himself what images were nagging him with a sense of uneasiness he could neither grasp nor dispel; they were too meaningless to define and too inexplicable to dismiss. One was the image of a way station they had passed without stopping, more than two hours ago: he had noticed the empty platform and the brightly lighted windows of the small station building; the lights came from empty rooms; he had seen no single human figure, neither in the building nor on the tracks outside. The other image was of the next way station they had passed: its platform was jammed with an agitated mob. Now they were far beyond the reach of the light or sound of any station.

He had to get the Comet out of here, he thought. He wondered why he felt it with such urgency and why it had seemed so crucially important to re-establish the Comet's run. A mere handful of passengers was rattling in her empty cars; men had no place to go and no goals to reach. It was not for their sake that he had struggled; he could not say for whose. Two phrases stood as the answer in his mind, driving him with the vagueness of a prayer and the scalding force of an absolute. One was: From Ocean to Ocean, forever—the other was: Don't let it go! ...

The conductor returned an hour later, with the fireman, whose face looked oddly grim.

“Mr. Willers,” said the fireman slowly, “Division Headquarters does not answer.”

Eddie Willers sat up, his mind refusing to believe it, yet knowing suddenly

that for some inexplicable reason *this* was what he had expected. “It’s impossible!” he said, his voice low; the fireman was looking at him, not moving. “The track phone must have been out of order.”

“No, Mr. Willers. It was not out of order. The line was alive all right. The Division Headquarters wasn’t. I mean, there was no one there to answer, or else no one who cared to.”

“But you know that that’s impossible!”

The fireman shrugged; men did not consider any disaster impossible these days.

Eddie Willers leaped to his feet. “Go down the length of the train,” he ordered the conductor. “Knock on all the doors—the occupied ones, that is—and see whether there’s an electrical engineer aboard.”

“Yes, sir.”

Eddie knew that they felt, as he felt it, that they would find no such man; not among the lethargic, extinguished faces of the passengers they had seen. “Come on,” he ordered, turning to the fireman.

They climbed together aboard the locomotive. The gray-haired engineer was sitting in his chair, staring out at the cacti. The engine’s headlight had stayed on and it stretched out into the night, motionless and straight, reaching nothing but the dissolving blur of crossties.

“Let’s try to find what’s wrong,” said Eddie, removing his coat, his voice half-order, half-plea. “Let’s try some more.”

“Yes, sir,” said the engineer, without resentment or hope.

The engineer had exhausted his meager store of knowledge; he had checked every source of trouble he could think of. He went crawling over and under the machinery, unscrewing its parts and screwing them back again, taking out pieces and replacing them, dismembering the motors at random, like a child taking a clock apart, but without the child’s conviction that knowledge is possible.

The fireman kept leaning out of the cab’s window, glancing at the black stillness and shivering, as if from the night air that was growing colder.

“Don’t worry,” said Eddie Willers, assuming a tone of confidence. “We’ve got to do our best, but if we fail, they’ll send us help sooner or later. They don’t abandon trains in the middle of nowhere.”

They didn’t used to,“. said the fireman.

Once in a while, the engineer raised his grease-smeared face to look at the grease-smeared face and shirt of Eddie Willers. “What’s the use, Mr. Willers?” he asked.

“We can’t let it go!” Eddie answered fiercely; he knew dimly that what he meant was more than the Comet ... and more than the railroad.

Moving from the cab through the three motor units and back to the cab again, his hands bleeding, his shirt sticking to his back, Eddie Willers was struggling to remember everything he had ever known about engines, anything he had learned in college, and earlier: anything he had picked up in those days when the station agents at Rockdale Station used to chase him off the rungs of their lumbering switch engines. The pieces connected to nothing; his brain seemed jammed and tight; he knew that motors were not his profession, he knew that he did not know and that it was now a matter of life or death for him to discover the knowledge. He was looking at the cylinders, the blades, the wires, the control panels still winking with lights. He was struggling not to allow into his mind the thought that was pressing against its periphery: What were the chances and how long would it take—according to the mathematical theory of probability—for primitive men, working by rule-of-thumb, to hit the right combination of parts and re-create the motor of this engine?

“What’s the use, Mr. Willers?” moaned the engineer.

“We can’t let it go!” he cried.

He did not know how many hours had passed when he heard the fireman shout suddenly, “Mr. Willers! Look!”

The fireman was leaning out the window, pointing into the darkness behind them.

Eddie Willers looked. An odd little light was swinging jerkily far in the distance; it seemed to be advancing at an imperceptible rate; it did not look like any sort of light he could identify.

After a while, it seemed to him that he distinguished some large black shapes advancing slowly; they were moving in a line parallel with the track; the spot of light hung low over the ground, swinging; he strained his ears, but heard nothing.

Then he caught a feeble, muffled beat that sounded like the hoofs of horses. The two men beside him were watching the black shapes with a look of growing terror, as if some supernatural apparition were advancing upon them out of the desert night. In the moment when they chuckled suddenly, joyously, recognizing the shapes, it was Eddie’s face that froze into a look of terror at the sight of a ghost more frightening than any they could have expected: it was a train of covered wagons.

The swinging lantern jerked to a stop by the side of the engine. “Hey, bud, can I give you a lift?” called a man who seemed to be the leader; he was chuckling. “Stuck, aren’t you?”

The passengers of the Comet were peering out of the windows; some were descending the steps and approaching. Women’s faces peeked from the wagons,

from among the piles of household goods; a baby wailed somewhere at the rear of the caravan.

"Are you crazy?" asked Eddie Willers.

"No, I mean it, brother. We got plenty of room. We'll give you folks a lift—for a price—if you want to get out of here." He was a lanky, nervous man, with loose gestures and an insolent voice, who looked like a side-show barker.

"This is the Taggart Comet," said Eddie Willers, choking.

"The Comet, eh? Looks more like a dead caterpillar to me. What's the matter, brother? You're not going anywhere—and you can't get there any more, even if you tried."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't think you're going to New York, do you?"

"We *are* going to New York."

"Then ... then you haven't heard?"

"*What?*"

"Say, when was the last time you spoke to any of your stations?"

"I don't know! ... Heard *what?*"

"That your Taggart Bridge is gone. Gone. Blasted to bits. Sound-ray explosion or something. Nobody knows exactly. Only there ain't any bridge any more to cross the Mississippi. There ain't any New York any more—leastways, not for folks like you and me to reach."

Eddie Willers did not know what happened next; he had fallen back against the side of the engineer's chair, staring at the open door of the motor unit; he did not know how long he stayed there, but when, at last, he turned his head, he saw that he was alone. The engineer and the fireman had left the cab. There was a scramble of voices outside, screams, sobs, shouted questions and the sound of the side-show barker's laughter.

Eddie pulled himself to the window of the cab: the Comet's passengers and crew were crowding around the leader of the caravan and his semi-ragged companions; he was waving his loose arms in gestures of command. Some of the better-dressed ladies from the Comet—whose husbands had apparently been first to make a deal—were climbing aboard the covered wagons, sobbing and clutching their delicate make-up cases.

"Step right up, folks, step right up!" the barker was yelling cheerfully. "We'll make room for everybody! A bit crowded, but moving—better than being left here for coyote fodder! The day of the iron horse is past! All we got is plain, old-fashioned horse! Slow, but sure!"

Eddie Willers climbed halfway down the ladder on the side of the engine, to see the crowd and to be heard. He waved one arm, hanging onto the rungs with

the other. "You're not going, are you?" he cried to his passengers. "You're not abandoning the Comet?"

They drew a little away from him, as if they did not want to look at him or answer. They did not want to hear questions their minds were incapable of weighing. He saw the blind faces of panic.

"What's the matter with the grease-monkey?" asked the barker, pointing at Eddie.

"Mr. Willers," said the conductor softly, "it's no use ..."

"Don't abandon the Comet!" cried Eddie Willers. "Don't let it go! Oh God, don't let it go!"

"Are you crazy?" cried the barker. "You've no idea what's going on at your railroad stations and headquarters! They're running around like a pack of chickens with their heads cut off! I don't think there's going to be a railroad left in business this side of the Mississippi, by tomorrow morning!"

"Better come along, Mr. Willers," said the conductor.

"No!" cried Eddie, clutching the metal rung as if he wanted his hand to grow fast to it.

The barker shrugged. "Well, it's *your* funeral!"

"Which way are you going?" asked the engineer, not looking at Eddie.

"Just going, brother! Just looking for some place to stop ... somewhere. We're from Imperial Valley, California. The 'People's Party' crowd grabbed the crops and any food we had in the cellars. Hoarding, they called it. So we just picked up and went. Got to travel by night, on account of the Washington crowd.... We're just looking for some place to live.... You're welcome to come along, buddy, if you've got no home—or else we can drop you off closer to some town or another."

The men of that caravan—thought Eddie indifferently—looked too mean-minded to become the founders of a secret, free settlement, and not mean-minded enough to become a gang of raiders; they had no more destination to find than the motionless beam of the headlight; and, like that beam, they would dissolve somewhere in the empty stretches of the country.

He stayed on the ladder, looking up at the beam. He did not watch while the last men ever to ride the Taggart Comet were transferred to the covered wagons.

The conductor went last. "Mr. Willers!" he called desperately. "Come along!"

"No," said Eddie.

The side-show barker waved his arm in an upward sweep at Eddie's figure on the side of the engine above their heads. "I hope you know what you're doing!" he cried, his voice half-threat, half-plea. "Maybe somebody will come this way to pick you up—next week or next month! Maybe! Who's going to, these days?"

“Get away from here,” said Eddie Willers.

He climbed back into the cab—when the wagons jerked forward and went swaying and creaking off into the night. He sat in the engineer’s chair of a motionless engine, his forehead pressed to the useless throttle. He felt like the captain of an ocean liner in distress, who preferred to go down with his ship rather than be saved by the canoe of savages taunting him with the superiority of their craft.

Then, suddenly, he felt the blinding surge of a desperate, righteous anger. He leaped to his feet, seizing the throttle. He had to start this train; in the name of some victory that he could not name, he had to start the engine moving.

Past the stage of thinking, calculation or fear, moved by some righteous defiance, he was pulling levers at random, he was jerking the throttle back and forth, he was stepping on the dead man’s pedal, which was dead, he was groping to distinguish the form of some vision that seemed both distant and close, knowing only that his desperate battle was fed by that vision and was fought for its sake.

Don’t let it go! his mind was crying—while he was seeing the streets of New York—Don’t let it go!—while he was seeing the lights of railroad signals—Don’t let it go!—while he was seeing the smoke rising proudly from factory chimneys, while he was struggling to cut through the smoke and reach the vision at the root of these visions.

He was pulling at coils of wire, he was linking them and tearing them apart—while the sudden sense of sunrays and pine trees kept pulling at the corners of his mind. Dagny!—he heard himself crying soundlessly—Dagny, in the name of the best within us! ... He was jerking at futile levers and at a throttle that had nothing to move.... Dagny!—he was crying to a twelve-year-old girl in a sunlit clearing of the woods—in the name of the best within us, I must now start this train! ... Dagny, *that* is what it was ... and you knew it, then, but I didn’t ... you knew it when you turned to look at the rails.... I said, “not business or earning a living” ... but, Dagny, business and earning a living and that in man which makes it possible—*that* is the best within us, that was the thing to defend ... in the name of saving it, Dagny, I must now start this train....

When he found that he had collapsed on the floor of the cab and knew that there was nothing he could do here any longer, he rose and he climbed down the ladder, thinking dimly of the engine’s wheels, even though he knew that the engineer had checked them. He felt the crunch of the desert dust under his feet when he let himself drop to the ground. He stood still and, in the enormous silence, he heard the rustle of tumbleweeds stirring in the darkness, like the chuckle of an invisible army made free to move when the Comet was not. He

heard a sharper rustle close by—and he saw the small gray shape of a rabbit rise on its haunches to sniff at the steps of a car of the Taggart Comet. With a jolt of murderous fury, he lunged in the direction of the rabbit, as if he could defeat the advance of the enemy in the person of that tiny gray form. The rabbit darted off into the darkness—but he knew that the advance was not to be defeated.

He stepped to the front of the engine and looked up at the letters TT. Then he collapsed across the rail and lay sobbing at the foot of the engine, with the beam of a motionless headlight above him going off into a limitless night.



The music of Richard Halley's Fifth Concerto streamed from his keyboard, past the glass of the window, and spread through the air, over the lights of the valley. It was a symphony of triumph. The notes flowed up, they spoke of rising and they were the rising itself, they were the essence and the form of upward motion, they seemed to embody every human act and thought that had ascent as its motive. It was a sunburst of sound, breaking out of hiding and spreading open. It had the freedom of release and the tension of purpose. It swept space clean and left nothing but the joy of an unobstructed effort. Only a faint echo within the sounds spoke of that from which the music had escaped, but spoke in laughing astonishment at the discovery that there was no ugliness or pain, and there never had had to be. It was the song of an immense deliverance.

The lights of the valley fell in glowing patches on the snow still covering the ground. There were shelves of snow on the granite ledges and on the heavy limbs of the pines. But the naked branches of the birch trees had a faintly upward thrust, as if in confident promise of the coming leaves of spring.

The rectangle of light on the side of a mountain was the window of Mulligan's study. Midas Mulligan sat at his desk, with a map and a column of figures before him. He was listing the assets of his bank and working on a plan of projected investments. He was noting down the locations he was choosing: "New York—Cleveland—Chicago ... New York—Philadelphia ... New York ... New York ... New York ..."

The rectangle of light at the bottom of the valley was the window of Danneskjöld's home. Kay Ludlow sat before a mirror, thoughtfully studying the shades of film make-up, spread open in a battered case. Ragnar Danneskjöld lay stretched on a couch, reading a volume of the works of Aristotle: "... for these truths hold good for everything that is, and not for some special genus apart from

others. And all men use them, because they are true of being *qua* being.... For a principle which every one must have who understands anything that is, is not a hypothesis.... Evidently then such a principle is the most certain of all; which principle this is, let us proceed to say. It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect....”

The rectangle of light in the acres of a farm was the window of the library of Judge Narragansett. He sat at a table, and the light of his lamp fell on the copy of an ancient document. He had marked and crossed out the contradictions in its statements that had once been the cause of its destruction. He was now adding a new clause to its pages: “Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of production and trade ...”

The rectangle of light in the midst of a forest was the window of the cabin of Francisco d’Anconia. Francisco lay stretched on the floor, by the dancing tongues of a fire, bent over sheets of paper, completing the drawing of his smelter. Hank Rearden and Ellis Wyatt sat by the fireplace. “John will design the new locomotives,” Rearden was saying, “and Dagny will run the first railroad between New York and Philadelphia. She—” And, suddenly, on hearing the next sentence, Francisco threw his head up and burst out laughing, a laughter of greeting, triumph and release. They could not hear the music of Halley’s Fifth Concerto now flowing somewhere high above the roof, but Francisco’s laughter matched its sounds. Contained in the sentence he had heard, Francisco was seeing the sunlight of spring on the open lawns of homes across the country, he was seeing the sparkle of motors, he was seeing the glow of the steel in the rising frames of new skyscrapers, he was seeing the eyes of youth looking at the future with no uncertainty or fear.

The sentence Rearden had uttered was: “She will probably try to take the shirt off my back with the freight rates she’s going to charge, but—I’ll be able to meet them.”

The faint glitter of light weaving slowly through space, on the highest accessible ledge of a mountain, was the starlight on the strands of Galt’s hair. He stood looking, not at the valley below, but at the darkness of the world beyond its walls. Dagny’s hand rested on his shoulder, and the wind blew her hair to blend with his. She knew why he had wanted to walk through the mountains tonight and what he had stopped to consider. She knew what words were his to speak and that she would be first to hear them.

They could not see the world beyond the mountains, there was only a void of darkness and rock, but the darkness was hiding the ruins of a continent: the roofless homes, the rusting tractors, the lightless streets, the abandoned rail. But far in the distance, on the edge of the earth, a small flame was waving in the

wind, the defiantly stubborn flame of Wyatt's Torch, twisting, being torn and regaining its hold, not to be uprooted or extinguished. It seemed to be calling and waiting for the words John Galt was now to pronounce.

"The road is cleared," said Galt. "We are going back to the world."

He raised his hand and over the desolate earth he traced in space the sign of the dollar.

THE END

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



“My personal life,” says Ayn Rand, “is a postscript to my novels; it consists of the sentence: ‘*And I mean it.*’ I have always lived by the philosophy I present in my books—and it has worked for me, as it works for my characters. The concretes differ, the abstractions are the same.

“I decided to be a writer at the age of nine, and everything I have done was integrated to that purpose. I am an American by choice and conviction. I was born in Europe, but I came to America because this was the country based on my moral premises and the only country where one could be fully free to write. I came here alone, after graduating from a European college. I had a difficult struggle, earning my living at odd jobs, until I could make a financial success of my writing. No one helped me, nor did I think at any time that it was anyone’s duty to help me.

“In college, I had taken history as my major subject, and philosophy as my special interest; the first—in order to have a factual knowledge of men’s past, for my future writing; the second—in order to achieve an objective definition of my values. I found that the first could be learned, but the second had to be done by me.

“I have held the same philosophy I now hold, for as far back as I can remember. I have learned a great deal through the years and expanded my knowledge of details, of specific issues, of definitions, of applications—and I intend to continue expanding it—but I have never had to change any of my fundamentals. My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only .absolute.

“The only philosophical debt I can acknowledge is to Aristotle. I most emphatically disagree with a great many parts of his philosophy—but his definition of the laws of logic and of the means of human knowledge is so great

an achievement that his errors are irrelevant by comparison. You will find my tribute to him in the titles of the three parts of ATLAS SHRUGGED.

“My other acknowledgment is on the dedication page of this novel. I knew what values of character I wanted to find in a man. I met such a man—and we have been married for twenty-eight years. His name is Frank O.’Connor.

“To all the readers who discovered *The Fountainhead* and asked me many questions about the wider application of its ideas, I want to say that I am answering these questions in the present novel and that *The Fountainhead* was only an overture to ATLAS SHRUGGED.

“I trust that no one will tell me that men such as I write about don’t exist. That this book has been written—and published—is my proof that they do.”

Table of Contents

- [Title Page](#)
- [Copyright Page](#)
- [Dedication](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [PART I - NON-CONTRADICTION](#)
- [CHAPTER I - THE THEME](#)
- [CHAPTER II - THE CHAIN](#)
- [CHAPTER III - THE TOP AND THE BOTTOM](#)
- [CHAPTER IV - THE IMMOVABLE MOVERS](#)
- [CHAPTER V - THE CLIMAX OF THE D'ANCONIAS](#)
- [CHAPTER VI - THE NON-COMMERCIAL](#)
- [CHAPTER VII - THE EXPLOITERS AND THE EXPLOITED](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII - THE JOHN GALT LINE](#)
- [CHAPTER IX - THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE](#)
- [CHAPTER X - WYATT'S TORCH](#)
- [PART II - EITHER-OR](#)
- [CHAPTER I - THE MAN WHO BELONGED ON EARTH](#)
- [CHAPTER II - THE ARISTOCRACY OF PULL](#)
- [CHAPTER III - WHITE BLACKMAIL](#)
- [CHAPTER IV - THE SANCTION OF THE VICTIM](#)
- [CHAPTER V - ACCOUNT OVERDRAWN](#)
- [CHAPTER VI - MIRACLE METAL](#)
- [CHAPTER VII - THE MORATORIUM ON BRAINS](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII - BY OUR LOVE](#)
- [CHAPTER IX - THE FACE WITHOUT PAIN OR FEAR OR GUILT](#)
- [CHAPTER X - THE SIGN OF THE DOLLAR](#)
- [PART III - A IS A](#)
- [CHAPTER I - ATLANTIS](#)
- [CHAPTER II - THE UTOPIA OF GREED](#)
- [CHAPTER III - ANTI-GREED](#)
- [CHAPTER IV - ANTI-LIFE](#)
- [CHAPTER V - THEIR BROTHERS' KEEPERS](#)
- [CHAPTER VI - THE CONCERTO OF DELIVERANCE](#)
- [CHAPTER VII - "THIS IS JOHN GALT SPEAKING"](#)
- [CHAPTER VIII - THE EGOIST](#)

- [CHAPTER IX - THE GENERATOR](#)
- [CHAPTER X - IN THE NAME OF THE BEST WITHIN US](#)