

I shouldn't look for it. But I'll always seek and hope. You're my last hope. You're all I have."

She stood at the wall, without moving.

"I need you," he wailed softly. "I'm all alone. You're not like the others. I believe in you. I trust you. What has all that money and fame and business and struggle given me? You're all I have . . ."

She stood without moving and the direction of her glance, lowered to look down at him, was the only form of recognition she gave him. The things he said about his suffering were lies, she thought; but the suffering was real; he was a man torn by some continual anguish, which he seemed unable to tell her, but which, perhaps, she could learn to understand. She still owed him this much—she thought, with the grayness of a sense of duty—in payment for the position he had given her, which, perhaps, was all he had to give, she owed him an effort to understand him.

It was strange to feel, in the days that followed, that she had become a stranger to herself, a stranger who had nothing to want or to seek. In place of a love made by the brilliant fire of hero worship, she was left with the gnawing drabness of pity. In place of the men she had struggled to find, men who fought for their goals and refused to suffer—she was left with a man whose suffering was his only claim to value and his only offer in exchange for her life. But it made no difference to her any longer. The one who was she, had looked with eagerness at the turn of every corner ahead, the passive stranger who had taken her place, was like all the over-groomed people around her, the people who said that they were adult because they did not try to think or desire.

But the stranger was still haunted by a ghost who was herself, and the ghost had a mission to accomplish. She had to learn to understand the things that had destroyed her. She had to know, and she lived with a sense of ceaseless waiting. She had to know, even though she felt that the headlight was closer and in the moment of knowledge she would be struck by the wheels.

What do you want of me?—was the question that kept beating in her mind as a clue. What do you want of me?—she kept crying soundlessly, at dinner tables, in drawing rooms, on sleepless nights—crying it to Jim and those who seemed to share his secret, to Ralph Eubank, to Dr. Simon Pritchett—what do you want of me? She did not ask it aloud; she knew that they would not answer. What do you want of me?—she asked, feeling as if she were running, but no way were open to escape. What do you want of me?—she asked, looking at the whole long torture of her marriage that had not lasted the full span of one year.

"What do you want of me?" she asked aloud—and saw that she was sitting at the table in her dining room, looking at Jim, at his feverish face, and at a drying stain of water on the table.

She did not know how long a span of silence had stretched between them, she was startled by her own voice and by the question she had not intended to utter. She did not expect him to understand it, he had never seemed to understand much simpler queries—and she shook her head, struggling to recapture the reality of the present.

She was startled to see him looking at her with a touch of derision, as if he were mocking her estimate of his understanding.

"Love," he answered.

She felt herself sagging with hopelessness, in the face of that answer which was at once so simple and so meaningless.

"You don't love me," he said accusingly. She did not answer. "You don't love me or you wouldn't ask such a question."

"I did love you once," she said dully, "but it wasn't what you wanted. I loved you for your courage, your ambition, your ability. But it wasn't real, any of it."

His lower lip swelled a little in a faint, contemptuous thrust. "What a shabby idea of love!" he said.

"Jim, what is it that you want to be loved for?"

"What a cheap shopkeeper's attitude!"

She did not speak; she looked at him, her eyes stretched by a silent question.

"To be loved *for*!" he said, his voice grating with mockery and righteousness. "So you think that love is a matter of mathematics, of exchange, of weighing and measuring, like a pound of butter on a grocery counter? I don't want to be loved *for* anything. I want to be loved for myself—not for anything I do or have or say or think for myself—not for my body or mind or words or works or actions."

"But then . . . what is yourself?"

"If you loved me, you wouldn't ask it." His voice had a shrill note of nervousness, as if he were swaying dangerously between caution and some blindly heedless impulse. "You wouldn't ask. You'd know. You'd *feel* it. Why do you always try to tag and label everything? Can't you rise above those petty materialistic definitions? Don't you ever feel—just *feel*?"

"Yes, Jim, I do," she said, her voice low. "But I am trying not to, because . . . because what I feel is fear."

"Of me?" he asked hopefully

"No, not exactly. Not fear of what you can do to me, but of what you are."

He dropped his eyelids with the swiftness of slamming a door—but she caught a flash of his eyes and the flash, incredibly, was terror. "You're not capable of love, you cheap little gold-digger!" he cried suddenly, in a tone stripped of all color but the desire to hurt. "Yes, I said gold-digger. There are many forms of it, other than greed for money, other and worse. You're a gold-digger of the spirit. You didn't marry me for my cash—but you married me for my ability or courage or whatever value it was that you set as the price of your love!"

"Do you want . . . love . . . to be . . . causeless?"

"Love is its own cause! Love is above causes and reasons. Love is blind. But you wouldn't be capable of it. You have the mean, scheming, calculating little soul of a shopkeeper who *trades*, but never *gives*! Love is a gift—a great, free, unconditional gift that transcends and forgives everything. What's the generosity of loving a man for his virtues? What do you give him? Nothing. It's no more than cold justice. No more than he's earned."

Her eyes were dark with the dangerous intensity of glimpsing her goal. "You want it to be unearned," she said, not in the tone of a question, but of a verdict.

"Oh, you don't understand!"

"Yes, Jim, I do. That's what you want—that's what all of you really want—not money, not material benefits, not economic security, not any of the handouts you keep demanding." She spoke in a flat monotone, as if reciting her thoughts to herself, intent upon giving the solid identity of words to the torturous shreds of chaos twisting in her mind. "All of you welfare preachers—it's not unearned money that you're after. You want handouts, but of a different kind. I'm a gold-digger of the spirit, you said, because I look for value. Then you, the welfare preachers . . . it's the spirit that you want to loot. I never thought and nobody ever told us how it could be thought of and what it would mean—the unearned in spirit. But that is what you want. You want unearned love. You want unearned admiration. You want unearned greatness. You want to be a man like Hank Rearden without the necessity of being what he is. Without the necessity of being anything. Without . . . the necessity . . . of being "

"Shut up!" he screamed.

They looked at each other, both in terror, both feeling as if they were swaying on an edge which she could not and he would not name, both knowing that one more step would be fatal.

"What do you think you're saying?" he asked in a tone of petty anger, which sounded almost benevolent by bringing them back into the realm of the normal, into the near-wholesomeness of nothing worse than a family quarrel. "What sort of metaphysical subject are you trying to deal with?"

"I don't know . . ." she said wearily, dropping her head, as if some shape she had tried to capture had slipped once more out of her grasp. "I don't know . . . It doesn't seem possible . . ."

"You'd better not try to wade in way over your head or—" But he had to stop, because the butler entered, bringing the glittering ice bucket with the champagne ordered for celebration.

They remained silent, letting the room be filled by the sounds which centuries of men and of struggle had established as the symbol of joyous attainment: the blast of the cork, the laughing tinkle of a pale gold liquid running into two broad cups filled with the weaving reflections of candles, the whisper of bubbles rising through two crystal stems, almost demanding that everything in sight rise, too, in the same aspiration.

They remained silent, till the butler had gone. Taggart sat looking down at the bubbles, holding the stem of his glass between two limply casual fingers. Then his hand closed suddenly about the stem into an awkwardly convulsed fist and he raised it, not as one lifts a glass of champagne, but as one would lift a butcher knife.

"To Francisco d'Anconia!" he said.

She put her glass down. "No," she answered.

"Drink it!" he screamed.

"No," she answered, her voice like a drop of lead.