

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 II THE ARISTOCRACY OF PULL

The calendar in the sky beyond the window of her office said: September 2. Dagny leaned wearily across her desk. The first light to snap on at the approach of dusk was always the ray that hit the calendar; when the white-glowing page appeared above the roofs, it blurred the city, hastening the darkness.

She had looked at that distant page every evening of the months behind her. Your days are numbered, it had seemed to say--as if it were marking a progression toward something it knew, but she didn't. Once, it had clocked her race to build the John Galt Line; now it was clocking her race against an unknown destroyer.

One by one, the men who had built new towns in Colorado, had departed into some silent unknown, from which no voice or person had yet returned. The towns they had left were dying. Some of the factories they built had remained ownerless and locked; others had been seized by the local authorities, the machines in both stood still.

She had felt as if a dark map of Colorado were spread before her like a traffic control panel, with a few lights scattered through its mountains. One after another, the lights had gone out. One after another, the men had vanished. There had been a pattern about it, which she felt, but could not define; she had become able to predict, almost with certainty, who would go next and when; she was unable to grasp the "why?"

Of the men who had once greeted her descent from the cab of an engine on the platform of Wyatt Junction, only Ted Nielsen was left, still running the plant of Nielsen Motors. "Ted, you won't be the next one to go?" she had asked him, on his recent visit to New York; she had asked it, trying to smile. He had answered grimly, "I hope not." "What do you mean, you hope?--aren't you sure?" He had said slowly, heavily, "Dagny, I've always thought that I'd rather die than stop working. But so did the men who're gone. It seems impossible to me that I could ever want to quit. But a year ago, it seemed impossible that they ever could. Those men were my friends. They knew what their going would do to us, the survivors. They would not have gone like that, without a word, leaving to us the added terror of the inexplicable--unless they had some reason of supreme importance. A month ago, Roger Marsh, of Marsh Electric, told me he'd have himself chained to his desk, so that he wouldn't be able to leave it, no matter what ghastly temptation struck him. He was furious with anger at the men who'd left. He swore to me