

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 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'd have a great deal of courage, Dagny. Some day, you'll have enough of it."

"Of what? Courage?"

But he did not answer.

## Chapter VI THE NON-COMMERCIAL

Rearden pressed his forehead to the mirror and tried not to think.

That was the only way he could go through with it, he told himself. He concentrated on the relief of the mirror's cooling touch, wondering how one went about forcing one's mind into blankness, particularly after a lifetime lived on the axiom that the constant, clearest, most ruthless function of his rational faculty was his foremost duty. He wondered why no effort had ever seemed beyond his capacity, yet now he could not scrape up the strength to stick a few black pearl studs into his starched white shirt front.

This was his wedding anniversary and he had known for three