

with all your laws and guns—just somebody naming the exact nature of what you're doing?"

"If you think it's proper to come to a celebration such as a wedding, in order to insult the host—"

"Why, James, I came here to thank you."

"To thank me?"

"Of course. You've done me a great favor—you and your boys in Washington and the boys in Santiago. Only I wonder why none of you took the trouble to inform me about it. Those directives that somebody issued here a few months ago are choking off the entire copper industry of this country. And the result is that this country suddenly has to import much larger amounts of copper. And where in the world is there any copper left—unless it's d'Anconia copper? So you see that I have good reason to be grateful."

"I assure you I had nothing to do with it," Taggart said hastily, "and besides, the vital economic policies of this country are not determined by any considerations such as you're intimating or—"

"I know how they're determined, James. I know that the deal started with the boys in Santiago, because they've been on the d'Anconia pay roll for centuries—well, no, 'pay roll' is an honorable word, it would be more exact to say that d'Anconia Copper has been paying them protection money for centuries—isn't that what your gangsters call it? Our boys in Santiago call it taxes. They've been getting their cut on every ton of d'Anconia copper sold. So they have a vested interest to see me sell as many tons as possible. But with the world turning into People's States, this is the only country left where men are not yet reduced to digging for roots in forests for their sustenance—so this is the only market left on earth. The boys in Santiago wanted to corner this market. I don't know what they offered to the boys in Washington, or who traded what and to whom—but I know that you came in on it somewhere, because you do hold a sizable chunk of d'Anconia Copper stock. And it surely didn't displease you—that morning, four months ago, the day after the directives were issued—to see the kind of soaring leap that d'Anconia Copper performed on the Stock Exchange. Why, it practically leaped off the ticker tape and into your face."

"Who gave you any grounds to invent an outrageous story of this kind?"

"Nobody. I knew nothing about it. I just saw the leap on the ticker tape that morning. That told the whole story, didn't it? Besides, the boys in Santiago slapped a new tax on copper the following week—and they told me that I shouldn't mind, not with the sudden rise of my stock. They were working for my best interests, they said. They said, why should I care—taking the two events together, I was richer than I had been before. True enough. I was."

"Why do you wish to tell me this?"

"Why don't you wish to take any credit for it, James? That's out of character and out of the policy at which you're such an expert. In an age when men exist, not by right, but by favor, one does not reject a grateful person, one tries to trap into gratitude as many

people as possible. Don't you want to have me as one of your men under obligation?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Think what a favor I received without any effort on my part. I wasn't consulted, I wasn't informed, I wasn't thought about, everything was arranged without me—and all I have to do now is produce the copper. That was a great favor, James—and you may be sure that I will repay it."

Francisco turned abruptly, not waiting for an answer, and started away. Taggart did not follow; he stood, feeling that anything was preferable to one more minute of their conversation.

Francisco stopped when he came to Dagny. He looked at her for a silent instant, without greeting, his smile acknowledging that she had been the first person he saw and the first one to see him at his entrance into the ballroom.

Against every doubt and warning in her mind, she felt nothing but a joyous confidence; inexplicably, she felt as if his figure in that crowd was a point of indestructible security. But in the moment when the beginning of a smile told him how glad she was to see him, he asked, "Don't you want to tell me what a brilliant achievement the John Galt Line turned out to be?"

She felt her lips trembling and tightening at once, as she answered, "I'm sorry if I show that I'm still open to be hurt. It shouldn't shock me that you've come to the stage where you despise achievement."

"Yes, don't I? I despise that Line so much that I didn't want to see it reach the kind of end it has reached."

He saw her look of sudden attentiveness, the look of thought rushing into a breach torn open upon a new direction. He watched her for a moment, as if he knew every step she would find along that road, then chuckled and said, "Don't you want to ask me now: Who is John Galt?"

"Why should I want to, and why now?"

"Don't you remember that you dared him to come and claim your Line? Well, he has."

He walked on, not waiting to see the look in her eyes—a look that held anger, bewilderment and the first faint gleam of a question mark.

It was the muscles of his own face that made Rearden realize the nature of his reaction to Francisco's arrival: he noticed suddenly that he was smiling and that his face had been relaxed into the dim well-being of a smile for some minutes past, as he watched Francisco d'Anconia in the crowd.

He acknowledged to himself, for the first time, all the half-grasped, half-rejected moments when he had thought of Francisco d'Anconia and thrust the thought aside before it became the knowledge of how much he wanted to see him again. In moments of sudden exhaustion—at his desk, with the fires of the furnaces going down in the twilight—in the darkness of the lonely walk through the empty countryside to his house—in the silence of sleepless nights—he had found himself thinking of the only man who had once seemed to be his spokesman. He had pushed the memory aside, telling himself: But