

nothing I won't be able to afford. Nothing. Just name it. I can give you anything you want. Go on, name it."

"I don't want anything, Jim."

"But I'd like to give you a present! To celebrate the occasion, see? Anything you take it into your head to ask. Anything. I can do it. I want to show you that I can do it. Any fancy you care to name."

"I haven't any fancies."

"Oh, come on! Want a yacht?"

"No."

"Want me to buy you the whole neighborhood where you lived in Buffalo?"

"No."

"Want the crown jewels of the People's State of England? They can be had, you know. That People's State has been hinting about it on the black market for a long time. But there aren't any old-fashioned tycoons left who're able to afford it. *I'm* able to afford it—or will be, after September second. Want it?"

"No."

"Then what *do* you want?"

"I don't want anything, Jim."

"But you've got to! You've got to want something, damn you!"

She looked at him, faintly startled, but otherwise indifferent.

"Oh, all right, I'm sorry," he said; he seemed astonished by his own outbreak. "I just wanted to please you," he added sullenly. "but I guess you can't understand it at all. You don't know how important it is. You don't know how big a man you're married to."

"I'm trying to find out," she said slowly.

"Do you still think, as you used to, that Hank Rearden is a great man?"

"Yes, Jim, I do."

"Well, I've got him beaten. I'm greater than any of them, greater than Rearden and greater than that other lover of my sister's, who—" He stopped, as if he had shd too far.

"Jim," she asked evenly, "what's going to happen on September second?"

He glanced up at her, from under his forehead—a cold glance, with his muscles creased into a semi-smile, as if in cynical breach of some hallowed restraint: "They're going to nationalize d'Anconia Copper," he said.

He heard the long, harsh roll of a motor, as a plane went by somewhere in the darkness above the roof, then a thin tinkle, as a piece of ice settled melting, in the silver bowl of his fruit cup—before she answered. She said, "He was your friend, wasn't he?"

"Oh, shut up!"

He remained silent, not looking at her. When his eyes came back to her face, she was still watching him and she spoke first, her voice oddly stern: "What your sister did in her radio broadcast was great."

"Yes, I know, I know, you've been saying that for a month."

"You've never answered me."

"What is there to ans . . . ?"

"Just as your friends in Washington have never answered her."

He remained silent. "Jim, I'm not dropping the subject." He did not answer. "Your friends in Washington never uttered a word about it. They did not deny the things she said, they did not explain, they did not try to justify themselves. They acted as if she had never spoken. I think they're hoping that people will forget it. Some people will. But the rest of us know what she said and that your friends were afraid to fight her."

"That's not true! The proper action was taken and the incident is closed and I don't see why you keep bringing it up."

"What action?"

"Bertram Scudder was taken off the air, as a program not in the public interest at the present time."

"Does that answer her?"

"It closed the issue and there's nothing more to be said about it."

"About a government that works by blackmail and extortion?"

"You can't say that nothing was done. It's been publicly announced that Scudder's programs were disruptive, destructive and untrustworthy."

"Jim, I want to understand this. Scudder wasn't on her side—he was on yours. He didn't even arrange that broadcast. He was acting on orders from Washington, wasn't he?"

"I thought you didn't like Bertram Scudder."

"I didn't and I don't, but—"

"Then what do you care?"

"But he was innocent, as far as your friends were concerned, wasn't he?"

"I wish you wouldn't bother with politics. You talk like a fool."

"He was innocent, wasn't he?"

"So what?"

She looked at him, her eyes incredulously wide. "Then they just made him the scapegoat, didn't they?"

"Oh, don't sit there looking like Eddie Willers!"

"Do I? I like Eddie Willers. He's honest."

"He's a damn half-wit who doesn't have the faintest idea of how to deal with practical reality!"

"But you do, don't you, Jim?"

"You bet I do!"

"Then couldn't you have helped Scudder?"

"I?" He burst into helpless, angry laughter. "Oh, why don't you grow up? I did my best to get Scudder thrown to the lions! Somebody had to be. Don't you know that it was *my* neck, if some other hadn't been found?"

"Your neck? Why not Dagny's, if she was wrong? Because she wasn't?"

"Dagny is an entirely different category! It had to be Scudder or me."

"Why?"

"And it's much better for national policy to let it be Scudder. This way, it's not necessary to argue about what she said—and if anybody brings it up, we start howling that it was said on Scudder's program and that Scudder's programs have been discredited and that Scudder

is a proven fraud and liar, etc., etc.—and do you think the public will be able to unscramble it? Nobody's ever trusted Bertram Scudder, anyway. Oh, don't stare at me like that! Would you rather they'd picked *me* to discredit?"

"Why not Dagny? Because her speech could *not* be discredited?"

"If you're so damn sorry for Bertram Scudder, you should have seen him try his damndest to make them break *my* neck! He's been doing that for years—how do you think he's got to where he was, except by climbing on carcasses? He thought he was pretty powerful, too—you should have seen how the big business tycoons used to be afraid of him! But he got himself outmaneuvered, this time. This time, he belonged to the wrong faction."

Dimly, through the pleasant stupor of relaxing, of sprawling back in his chair and smiling, he knew that this was the enjoyment he wanted, to be himself. To be himself—he thought, in the drugged, precarious state of floating past the deadliest of his blind alleys, the one that led to the question of what was himself.

"You see, he belonged to the Tinky Holloway faction. It was pretty much of a seesaw for a while, between the Tinky Holloway faction and the Chuck Morrison faction. But we won. Tinky made a deal and agreed to scuttle his pal Bertram in exchange for a few things he needed from us. You should have heard Bertram howl! But he was a dead duck and he knew it."

He started on a rolling chuckle, but choked it off, as the haze cleared and he saw his wife's face. "Jim," she whispered, "is that the sort of . . . victories you're winning?"

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" he screamed, smashing his fist down on the table. "Where have you been all these years? What sort of world do you think you're living in?" His blow had upset his water glass and the water went spreading in dark stains over the lace of the tablecloth.

"I'm trying to find out," she whispered. Her shoulders were sagging and her face looked suddenly worn, an odd, aged look that seemed haggard and lost.

"I couldn't help it!" he burst out in the silence. "I'm not to blame! I have to take things as I find them! It's not I who've made this world!"

He was shocked to see that she smiled—a smile of so fiercely bitter a contempt that it seemed incredible on her gently patient face; she was not looking at him, but at some image of her own. "That's what *my* father used to say when he got drunk at the corner saloon instead of looking for work."

"How dare you try comparing me to—" he started, but did not finish, because she was not listening.

Her words, when she looked at him again, astonished him as completely irrelevant. "The date of that nationalization, September second," she asked, her voice wistful, "was it you who picked it?"

"No. I had nothing to do with it. It's the date of some special session of their legislature. Why?"

"It's the date of our first wedding anniversary."

"Oh? Oh, that's right!" He smiled, relieved at the change to a