

of the elevator and, not waiting, racing on down the stairs. Rearden followed him and, watching the dial of the elevator on the stair landings, they met it halfway down the height of the building. Before the steel cage had ceased trembling at the sill of the ground floor, Francisco was out, racing to meet the sound of the call for help. Rearden had thought himself a good runner, but he could not keep up with the swift figure streaking off through stretches of red glare and darkness, the figure of a useless playboy he had hated himself for admiring.

The stream, gushing from a hole low on the side of a blast furnace, did not have the red glow of fire, but the white radiance of sunlight. It poured along the ground, branching off at random in sudden streaks; it cut through a dank fog of steam with a bright suggestion of morning. It was liquid iron, and what the scream of the alarm proclaimed was a break-out.

The charge of the furnace had been hung up and, breaking, had blown the tap-hole open. The furnace foreman lay knocked unconscious, the white flow spurted, slowly tearing the hole wider, and men were struggling with sand, hose and fire clay to stop the glowing streaks that spread in a heavy, gliding motion, eating everything on their way into jets of acrid smoke.

In the few moments which Rearden needed to grasp the sight and nature of the disaster, he saw a man's figure rising suddenly at the foot of the furnace, a figure outlined by the red glare almost as if it stood in the path of the torrent, he saw the swing of a white shirt-sleeved arm that rose and flung a black object into the source of the spurting metal. It was Francisco d'Anconia, and his action belonged to an art which Rearden had not believed any man to be trained to perform any longer.

Years before, Rearden had worked in an obscure steel plant in Minnesota, where it had been his job, after a blast furnace was tapped, to close the hole by hand—by throwing bullets of fire clay to dam the flow of the metal. It was a dangerous job that had taken many lives, it had been abolished years earlier by the invention of the hydraulic gun; but there had been struggling, failing mills which, on their way down, had attempted to use the outworn equipment and methods of a distant past. Rearden had done the job; but in the years since, he had met no other man able to do it. In the midst of shooting jets of live steam, in the face of a crumbling blast furnace, he was now seeing the tall, slim figure of the playboy performing the task with the skill of an expert.

It took an instant for Rearden to tear off his coat, seize a pair of goggles from the first man in sight and join Francisco at the mouth of the furnace. There was no time to speak, to feel or to wonder. Francisco glanced at him once—and what Rearden saw was a smudged face, black goggles and a wide grin.

They stood on a slippery bank of baked mud, at the edge of the white stream, with the raging hole under their feet, flinging clay into the glare where the twisting tongues that looked like gas were boiling metal. Rearden's consciousness became a progression of bending, raising the weight, aiming and sending it down and, before it had

reached its unseen destination, bending for the next one again, a consciousness drawn tight upon watching the aim of his arm, to save the furnace, and the precarious posture of his feet, to save himself. He was aware of nothing else—except that the sum of it was the exultant feeling of action, of his own capacity, of his body's precision, of its response to his will: And, with no time to know it, but knowing it, seizing it with his senses past the censorship of his mind, he was seeing a black silhouette with red rays shooting from behind its shoulders, its elbows, its angular curves, the red rays circling through steam like the long needles of spotlights, following the movements of a swift, expert, confident being whom he had never seen before except in evening clothes under the lights of ballrooms.

There was no time to form words, to think, to explain, but he knew that this was the real Francisco d'Anconia, this was what he had seen from the first and loved—the word did not shock him, because there was no word in his mind, there was only a joyous feeling that seemed like a flow of energy added to his own.

To the rhythm of his body, with the scorching heat on his face and the winter night on his shoulder blades, he was seeing suddenly that this was the simple essence of his universe: the instantaneous refusal to submit to disaster, the irresistible drive to fight it, the triumphant feeling of his own ability to win. He was certain that Francisco felt it, too, that he had been moved by the same impulse, that it was right to feel it, right for both of them to be what they were—he caught glimpses of a sweat-streaked face intent upon action, and it was the most joyous face he had ever seen.

The furnace stood above them, a black bulk wrapped in coils of tubes and steam; she seemed to pant, shooting red gasps that hung on the air above the mills—and they fought not to let her bleed to death. Sparks hung about their feet and burst in sudden sheafs out of the metal, dying unnoticed against their clothes, against the skin of their hands. The stream was coming slower, in broken spurts through the dam rising beyond their sight.

It happened so fast that Rearden knew it fully only after it was over. He knew that there were two moments: the first was when he saw the violent swing of Francisco's body in a forward thrust that sent the bullet to continue the line in space, then he saw the sudden, un rhythmic jerk backward that did not succeed, the convulsive beating against a forward pull, the extended arms of the silhouette losing its balance, he thought that a leap across the distance between them on the slippery, crumbling ridge would mean the death of both of them—and the second moment was when he landed at Francisco's side, held him in his arms, hung swaying together between space and ridge, over the white pit, then gained his footing and pulled him back, and, for an instant, still held the length of Francisco's body against the length of his own, as he would have held the body of an only son. His love, his terror, his relief were in a single sentence:

"Be careful, you goddamn fool!"

Francisco reached for a chunk of clay and went on.

When the job was done and the gap was closed, Rearden noticed that there was a twisting pain in the muscles of his arms and legs.