

or wealth—to such among you, I am now saying: I wanted him, I had him, I was happy, I had known joy, a pure, full, guiltless joy, the joy you dread to hear confessed by any human being, the joy of which your only knowledge is in your hatred for those who are worthy of reaching it. Well, hate me, then—because I reached it!”

“Miss Taggart,” said Bertram Scudder nervously, “aren’t we departing from the subject of . . . After all, your personal relationship with Mr. Rearden has no political significance which—”

“I didn’t think it had, either. And, of course, I came here to tell you about the political and moral system under which you are now living. Well, I thought that I knew everything about Hank Rearden, but there was one thing which I did not learn until today. It was the blackmail threat that our relationship would be made public that forced Hank Rearden to sign the Gift Certificate surrendering Rearden Metal. It was blackmail—blackmail by your government officials, by your rulers, by your—”

In the instant when Scudder’s hand swept out to knock the microphone over, a faint click came from its throat as it crashed to the floor, signifying that the intellectual cop had cut the broadcast off the air.

She laughed—but there was no one to see her and to hear the nature of her laughter. The figures rushing into the glass enclosure were screaming at one another. Chick Morrison was yelling unprintable curses at Bertram Scudder—Bertram Scudder was shouting that he had been opposed to the whole idea, but had been ordered to do it—James Taggart looked like an animal baring its teeth, while he snarled at two of Morrison’s youngest assistants and avoided the snarls of an older third. The muscles of Lillian Rearden’s face had an odd slackness, like the limbs of an animal lying in the road, intact but dead. The morale conditioners were shrieking what they guessed they thought Mr. Mouch would think. “What am I to say to them?” the program announcer was crying, pointing at the microphone. “Mr. Morrison, there’s an audience waiting, what am I to say?” Nobody answered him. They were not fighting over what to do, but over whom to blame.

Nobody said a word to Dagny or glanced in her direction. Nobody stopped her, when she walked out.

She stepped into the first taxicab in sight, giving the address of her apartment. As the cab started, she noticed that the dial of the radio on the driver’s panel was lighted and silent, crackling with the brief, tense coughs of static: it was tuned to Bertram Scudder’s program.

She lay back against the seat, feeling nothing but the desolation of the knowledge that the sweep of her action had, perhaps, swept away the man who might never wish to see her again. She felt, for the first time, the immensity of the hopelessness of finding him—if he did not choose to be found—in the streets of the city, in the towns of a continent, in the canyons of the Rocky Mountains where the goal was closed by a screen of rays. But one thing remained to her, like a log floating on a void, the log to which she had clung through the broadcast—and she knew that this was the thing she

could not abandon, even were she to lose all the rest; it was the sound of his voice saying to her: "Nobody stays here by faking reality in any manner whatever."

"Ladies and gentlemen," the voice of Bertram Scudder's announcer crackled suddenly out of the static, "due to technical difficulties over which we have no control, this station will remain off the air, pending the necessary readjustments." The taxi driver gave a brief, contemptuous chuckle—and snapped the radio off.

When she stepped out and handed him a bill, he extended the change to her and, suddenly, leaned forward for a closer look at her face. She felt certain that he recognized her and she held his glance austerely for an instant. His bitter face and his overpatched shirt were worn out by a hopeless, losing struggle. As she handed him a tip, he said quietly, with too earnest, too solemn an emphasis for a mere acknowledgment of the coins, "*Thank you, ma'am.*"

She turned swiftly and hurried into the building, not to let him see the emotion which was suddenly more than she could bear.

Her head was drooping, as she unlocked the door of her apartment, and the light struck her from below, from the carpet, before she jerked her head up in astonishment at finding the apartment lighted. She took a step forward—and saw Hank Rearden standing across the room.

She was held still by two shocks: one was the sight of his presence, she had not expected him to be back so soon; the other was the sight of his face. His face had so firm, so confident, so mature a look of calm, in the faint half-smile, in the clarity of the eyes, that she felt as if he had aged decades within one month, but aged in the proper sense of human growth, aged in vision, in stature, in power. She felt that he who had lived through a month of agony, he whom she had hurt so deeply and was about to hurt more deeply still, he would now be the one to give her support and consolation, his would be the strength to protect them both. She stood motionless for only an instant, but she saw his smile deepening as if he were reading her thoughts and telling her that she had nothing to fear. She heard a slight, crackling sound and saw, on a table beside him, the lighted dial of a silent radio. Her eyes moved to his as a question and he answered by the faintest nod, barely more than a lowering of his eyelids; he had heard her broadcast.

They moved toward each other in the same moment. He seized her shoulders to support her, her face was raised to his, but he did not touch her lips, he took her hand and kissed her wrist, her fingers, her palm, as the sole form of the greeting which so much of his suffering had gone to await. And suddenly, broken by the whole of this day and of that month, she was sobbing in his arms, slumped against him, sobbing as she had never done in her life, as a woman, in surrender to pain and in a last, futile protest against it.

Holding her so that she stood and moved only by means of his body, not hers, he led her to the couch and tried to make her sit down beside him, but she slipped to the floor, to sit at his feet and bury her face in his knees and sob without defense or disguise.

He did not lift her, he let her cry, with his arm tight about her.