

the night of the mass meeting in a factory in Wisconsin, to the Atlantis of a valley hidden in the Rocky Mountains, to the triumphant mockery of the green eyes of the superlative intelligence above a worker's figure at the foot of the tower—it contained her pride in herself and that it should be she whom he had chosen as his mirror, that it should be her body which was now giving him the sum of his existence, as his body was giving her the sum of hers. These were the things it contained—but what she knew was only the sensation of the movement of his hand on her breasts.

He tore off her cape and she felt the slenderness of her own body by means of the circle of his arms, as if his person were only a tool for her triumphant awareness of herself, but that self were only a tool for her awareness of him. It was as if she were reaching the limit of her capacity to feel, yet what she felt was like a cry of impatient demand, which she was now incapable of naming, except that it had the same quality of ambition as the course of her life, the same inexhaustible quality of radiant greed.

He pulled her head back for a moment, to look straight into her eyes, to let her see his, to let her know the full meaning of their actions, as if throwing the spotlight of consciousness upon them for the meeting of their eyes in a moment of intimacy greater than the one to come.

Then she felt the mesh of burlap striking the skin of her shoulders, she found herself lying on the broken sandbags, she saw the long, tight gleam of her stockings, she felt his mouth pressed to her ankle, then rising in a tortured motion up the line of her leg, as if he wished to own its shape by means of his lips, then she felt her teeth sinking into the flesh of his arm, she felt the sweep of his elbow knocking her head aside and his mouth seizing her lips with a pressure more viciously painful than hers—then she felt, when it hit her throat, that which she knew only as an upward streak of motion that released and united her body into a single shock of pleasure—then she knew nothing but the motion of his body and the driving greed that went reaching on and on, as if she were not a person any longer, only a sensation of endless reaching for the impossible—then she knew that it was possible, and she gasped and lay still, knowing that nothing more could be desired, ever.

He lay beside her, on his back, looking up at the darkness of the granite vault above them, she saw him stretched on the jagged slant of sandbags as if his body were fluid in relaxation, she saw the black wedge of her cape flung across the rails at their feet, there were beads of moisture twinkling on the vault, shifting slowly, running into invisible cracks, like the lights of a distant traffic. When he spoke, his voice sounded as if he were quietly continuing a sentence in answer to the questions in her mind, as if he had nothing to hide from her any longer and what he owed her now was only the act of undressing his soul, as simply as he would have undressed his body.

“ . . . this is how I've watched you for ten years . . . from here, from under the ground under your feet . . . knowing every move you made in your office at the top of the building, but never seeing you, never enough . . . ten years of nights, spent waiting to catch a

glimpse of you, here, on the platforms, when you boarded a train . . . Whenever the order came down to couple your car, I'd know of it and wait and see you come down the ramp, and wish you didn't walk so fast . . . it was so much like you, that walk, I'd know it anywhere . . . your walk and those legs of yours . . . it was always your legs that I'd see first, hurrying down the ramp, going past me as I looked up at you from a dark side track below. . . . I think I could have molded a sculpture of your legs, I knew them, not with my eyes, but with the palms of my hands when I watched you go by . . . when I turned back to my work . . . when I went home just before sunrise for the three hours of sleep which I didn't get . . ."

"I love you," she said, her voice quiet and almost toneless except for a fragile sound of youth.

He closed his eyes, as if letting the sound travel through the years behind them. "Ten years, Dagny . . . except that once there were a few weeks when I had you before me, in plain sight, within reach, not hurrying away, but held still, as on a lighted stage, a private stage for me to watch . . . and I watched you for hours through many evenings . . . in the lighted window of an office that was called the John Galt Line. . . . And one night—"

Her breath was a faint gasp. "Was it you, that night?"

"Did you see me?"

"I saw your shadow . . . on the pavement . . . pacing back and forth . . . it looked like a struggle . . . it looked like—" She stopped: she did not want to say "torture."

"It was," he said quietly. "That night, I wanted to walk in, to face you, to speak, to . . . That was the night I came closest to breaking my oath, when I saw you slumped across your desk, when I saw you broken by the burden you were carrying—"

"John, that night, it was *you* that I was thinking of . . . only I didn't know it . . ."

"But, you see, I knew it."

" . . . it was you, all my life, through everything I did and everything I wanted . . ."

"I know it."

"John, the hardest was not when I left you in the valley . . . it was—"

"Your radio speech, the day you returned?"

"Yes! Were you listening?"

"Of course. I'm glad you did it. It was a magnificent thing to do. And I—I knew it, anyway."

"You knew . . . about Hank Rearden?"

"Before I saw you in the valley."

"Was it . . . when you learned about him, had you expected it?"

"No."

"Was it . . . ?" She stopped.

"Hard? Yes. But only for the first few days. That next night . . . Do you want me to tell you what I did the night after I learned it?"

"Yes."

"I had never seen Hank Rearden, only pictures of him in the newspapers. I knew that he was in New York, that night, at some

conference of big industrialists. I wanted to have just one look at him. I went to wait at the entrance of the hotel where that conference was held. There were bright lights under the marquee of the entrance, but it was dark beyond, on the pavement, so I could see without being seen, there were a few loafers and vagrants hanging around, there was a drizzle of rain and we clung to the walls of the building. One could tell the members of the conference when they began filing out, by their clothes and their manner—ostentatiously prosperous clothes and a manner of overbearing timidity, as if they were guiltily trying to pretend that they were what they appeared to be for that moment. There were chauffeurs driving up their cars, there were a few reporters delaying them for questions and hangers-on trying to catch a word from them. They were worn men, those industrialists, aging, flabby, frantic with the effort to disguise uncertainty. And then I saw him. He wore an expensive trenchcoat and a hat slanting across his eyes. He walked swiftly, with the kind of assurance that has to be earned, as he'd earned it. Some of his fellow industrialists pounced on him with questions, and those tycoons were acting like hangers-on around him. I caught a glimpse of him as he stood with his hand on the door of his car, his head lifted. I saw the brief flare of a smile under the slanting brim, a confident smile, impatient and a little amused. And then, for one instant, I did what I had never done before, what most men wreck their lives on doing—I saw that moment out of context, I saw the world as he made it look, as if it matched him, as if he were its symbol—I saw a world of achievement, of unenslaved energy, of unobstructed drive through purposeful years to the enjoyment of one's reward—I saw, as I stood in the rain in a crowd of vagrants, what my years would have brought me, if that world had existed, and I felt a desperate longing—he was the image of everything I should have been . . . and he had everything that should have been mine. . . . But it was only a moment. Then I saw the scene in full context again and in all of its actual meaning—I saw what price he was paying for his brilliant ability, what torture he was enduring in silent bewilderment, struggling to understand what I had understood—I saw that the world he suggested, did not exist and was yet to be made. I saw him again for what he was, the symbol of my battle, the unrewarded hero whom I was to avenge and to release—and then . . . then I accepted what I had learned about you and him. I saw that it changed nothing, that I should have expected it—that it was right."

He heard the faint sound of her moan and he chuckled softly.

"Dagny, it's not that I don't suffer, it's that I know the unimportance of suffering, I know that pain is to be fought and thrown aside, not to be accepted as part of one's soul and as a permanent scar across one's view of existence. Don't feel sorry for me. It was gone right then."

She turned her head to look at him in silence, and he smiled, lifting himself on an elbow to look down at her face as she lay helplessly still. She whispered, "You've been a track laborer, here—here!—for twelve years . . ."

"Yes."