

are collapsing under the threat of a steel shortage. There is no reason to expect a steel shortage." "It is a slanderous, unfounded rumor that a Steel Unification Plan had been in the making and that it had been favored by Mr. Orren Boyle. Mr. Boyle's attorney has issued an emphatic denial and has assured the press that Mr. Boyle is now vehemently opposed to any such plan. Mr. Boyle, at the moment, is suffering from a nervous breakdown."

But some news could be witnessed in the streets of New York, in the cold, dank twilight of autumn evenings: a crowd gathered in front of a hardware store, where the owner had thrown the doors open, inviting people to help themselves to the last of his meager stock, while he laughed in shrieking sobs and went smashing his plate-glass windows—a crowd gathered at the door of a run-down apartment house, where a police ambulance stood waiting, while the bodies of a man, his wife and their three children were being removed from a gas-filled room; the man had been a small manufacturer of steel castings.

If they see Hank Rearden's value now—she thought—why didn't they see it sooner? Why hadn't they averted their own doom and spared him his years of thankless torture? She found no answer.

In the silence of sleepless nights, she thought that Hank Rearden and she had now changed places. He was in Atlantis and she was locked out by a screen of light—he was, perhaps, calling to her as she had called to his struggling airplane, but no signal could reach her through that screen.

Yet the screen split open for one brief break—for the length of a letter she received a week after he vanished. The envelope bore no return address, only the postmark of some hamlet in Colorado. The letter contained two sentences:

I have met him. I don't blame you.

H. R.

She sat still for a long time, looking at the letter, as if unable to move or to feel. She felt nothing, she thought, then noticed that her shoulders were trembling in a faint, continuous shudder, then grasped that the tearing violence within her was made of an exultant tribute, of gratitude and of despair—her tribute to the victory that the meeting of these two men implied, the final victory of both—her gratitude that those in Atlantis still regarded her as one of them and had granted her the exception of receiving a message—the despair of the knowledge that her blankness was a struggle not to hear the questions she was now hearing. Had Galt abandoned her? Had he gone to the valley to meet his greatest conquest? Would he come back? Had he given her up? The unendurable was not that these questions had no answer, but that the answer was so simply, so easily within her reach and that she had no right to take a step to reach it.

She had made no attempt to see him. Every morning, for a month, on entering her office, she had been conscious, not of the room around her, but of the tunnels below, under the floors of the building—and she had worked, feeling as if some marginal part of her brain was computing figures, reading reports, making decisions in a rush of lifeless activity, while her living mind was inactive and still,

frozen in contemplation, forbidden to move beyond the sentence: He's down there. The only inquiry she had permitted herself had been a glance at the payroll list of the Terminal workers. She had seen the name: Galt, John. The list had carried it, openly, for over twelve years. She had seen an address next to the name—and, for a month, had struggled to forget it.

It had seemed hard to live through that month—yet now, as she looked at the letter, the thought that Galt had gone was still harder to bear. Even the struggle of resisting his proximity had been a link to him, a price to pay, a victory achieved in his name. Now there was nothing, except a question that was not to be asked. His presence in the tunnels had been her motor through those days—just as his presence in the city had been her motor through the months of that summer—just as his presence somewhere in the world had been her motor through the years before she ever heard his name. Now she felt as if her motor, too, had stopped.

She went on, with the bright, pure glitter of a five dollar gold piece, which she kept in her pocket, as her last drop of fuel. She went on, protected from the world around her by a last armor: indifference.

The newspapers did not mention the outbreaks of violence that had begun to burst across the country—but she watched them through the reports of train conductors about bullet-riddled cars, dismantled tracks, attacked trains, besieged stations, in Nebraska, in Oregon, in Texas, in Montana—the futile, doomed outbreaks, prompted by nothing but despair, ending in nothing but destruction. Some were the explosions of local gangs; some spread wider. There were districts that rose in blind rebellion, arrested the local officials, expelled the agents of Washington, killed the tax collectors—then, announcing their secession from the country, went on to the final extreme of the very evil that had destroyed them, as if fighting murder with suicide: went on to seize all property within their reach, to declare community bondage of all to all, and to perish within a week, their meager loot consumed, in the bloody hatred of all for all, in the chaos of no rules save that of the gun, to perish under the lethargic thrust of a few worn soldiers sent out from Washington to bring order to the ruins.

The newspapers did not mention it. The editorials went on speaking of self-denial as the road to future progress, of self-sacrifice as the moral imperative, of greed as the enemy, of love as the solution—their threadbare phrases as sickeningly sweet as the odor of ether in a hospital.

Rumors went spreading through the country in whispers of cynical terror—yet people read the newspapers and acted as if they believed what they read, each competing with the others on who would keep most blindly silent, each pretending that he did not know what he knew, each striving to believe that the unnamed was the unreal. It was as if a volcano were cracking open, yet the people at the foot of the mountain ignored the sudden fissures, the black fumes, the boiling trickles, and went on believing that their only danger was to acknowledge the reality of these signs.