

blow, the shock as her only awareness. "Hank!—how did you know it?"

He smiled and pointed at the radio. "My darling, you used nothing but the past tense."

"Oh . . . !" Her voice was now half-gasp, half-moan, and she closed her eyes.

"You never pronounced the one word you would have rightfully thrown at them, were it otherwise. You said, 'I wanted him,' not, 'I love him.' You told me on the phone today that you could have returned sooner. No other reason would have made you leave me as you did. Only that one reason was valid and right."

She was leaning back a little, as if fighting for balance to stand, yet she was looking straight at him, with a smile that did not part her lips, but softened her eyes to a glance of admiration and her mouth to a shape of pain.

"It's true. I've met the man I love and will always love, I've seen him, I've spoken to him—but he's a man whom I can't have, whom I may never have and, perhaps, may never see again."

"I think I've always known that you would find him. I knew what you felt for me, I knew how much it was, but I knew that I was not your final choice. What you'll give him is not taken away from me, it's what I've never had. I can't rebel against it. What I've had means too much to me—and that I've had it, can never be changed."

"Do you want me to say it, Hank?" Will you understand it, if I say that I'll always love you?"

"I think I've understood it before you did."

"I've always seen you as you are now. That greatness of yours which you are just beginning to allow yourself to know—I've always known it and I've watched your struggle to discover it. Don't speak of atonement, you have not hurt me, your mistakes came from your magnificent integrity under the torture of an impossible code—and your fight against it did not bring me suffering, it brought me the feeling I've found too seldom: admiration. If you will accept it, it will always be yours. What you meant to me can never be changed. But the man I met—he is the love I had wanted to reach long before I knew that he existed, and I think he will remain beyond my reach, but that I love him will be enough to keep me living."

He took her hand and pressed it to his lips. "Then you know what I feel," he said, "and why I am still happy."

Looking up at his face, she realized that for the first time he was what she had always thought him intended to be: a man with an immense capacity for the enjoyment of existence. The taut look of endurance, of fiercely unadmitted pain, was gone; now, in the midst of the wreckage and of his hardest hour, his face had the serenity of pure strength; it had the look she had seen in the faces of the men in the valley.

"Hank," she whispered, "I don't think I can explain it, but I feel that I have committed no treason, either to you or to him."

"You haven't."

Her eyes seemed abnormally alive in a face drained of color, as if her consciousness remained untouched in a body broken by ex-

haustion. He made her sit down and slipped his arm along the back of the couch, not touching her, yet holding her in a protective embrace.

"Now tell me," he asked, "where were you?"

"I can't tell you that. I've given my word never to reveal anything about it. I can say only that it's a place I found by accident, when I crashed, and I left it blindfolded—and I wouldn't be able to find it again."

"Couldn't you trace your way back to it?"

"I won't try."

"And the man?"

"I won't look for him."

"He remained there?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you leave him?"

"I can't tell you."

"Who is he?"

Her chuckle of desperate amusement was involuntary. "Who is John Galt?"

He glanced at her, astonished—but realized that she was not joking. "So there is a John Galt?" he asked slowly.

"Yes."

"That slang phrase refers to *him*?"

"Yes."

"And it has some special meaning?"

"Oh yes! . . . There's one thing I can tell you about him, because I discovered it earlier, without promise of secrecy, he is the man who invented the motor we found."

"Oh!" He smiled, as if he should have known it. Then he said softly, with a glance that was almost compassion. "He's the destroyer, isn't he?" He saw her look of shock, and added, "No, don't answer me, if you can't. I think I know where you were. It was Quentin Daniels that you wanted to save from the destroyer, and you were following Daniels when you crashed, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Good God, Dagny!—does such a place really exist? Are they all alive? Is there . . . ? I'm sorry. Don't answer."

She smiled. "It does exist."

He remained silent for a long time.

"Hank, could you give up Rearden Steel?"

"No!" The answer was fiercely immediate, but he added, with the first sound of hopelessness in his voice, "Not yet."

Then he looked at her, as if, in the transition of his three words, he had lived the course of her agony of the past month. "I see," he said. He ran his hand over her forehead, with a gesture of understanding, of compassion, of an almost incredulous wonder. "What hell you've now undertaken to endure!" he said, his voice low.

She nodded.

She slipped down, to lie stretched, her face on his knees. He stroked her hair; he said, "We'll fight the looters as long as we can. I don't know what future is possible to us, but we'll win or we'll

learn that it's hopeless. Until we do, we'll fight for our world. We're all that's left of it."

She fell asleep, lying there, her hand clasping his. Her last awareness, before she surrendered the responsibility of consciousness, was the sense of an enormous void, the void of a city and of a continent where she would never be able to find the man whom she had no right to seek.

Chapter IV ANTI-LIFE

James Taggart reached into the pocket of his dinner jacket, pulled out the first wad of paper he found, which was a hundred-dollar bill, and dropped it into the beggar's hand.

He noticed that the beggar pocketed the money in a manner as indifferent as his own. "Thanks, bud," said the beggar contemptuously, and walked away.

James Taggart remained still in the middle of the sidewalk, wondering what gave him a sense of shock and dread. It was not the man's insolence—he had not sought any gratitude, he had not been moved by pity, his gesture had been automatic and meaningless. It was that the beggar acted as if he would have been indifferent had he received a hundred dollars or a dime or, failing to find any help whatever, he had seen himself dying of starvation within this night. Taggart shuddered and walked brusquely on, the shudder serving to cut off the realization that the beggar's mood matched his own.

The walls of the street around him had the stressed, unnatural clarity of a summer twilight, while an orange haze filled the channels of intersections and veiled the tiers of roofs, leaving him on a shrinking remnant of ground. The calendar in the sky seemed to stand insistently out of the haze, yellow like a page of old parchment, saying: August 5.

No—he thought, in answers to things he had not named—it was not true, he felt fine, that's why he wanted to do something tonight. He could not admit to himself that his peculiar restlessness came from a desire to experience pleasure; he could not admit that the particular pleasure he wanted was that of celebration, because he could not admit what it was that he wanted to celebrate.

This had been a day of intense activity, spent on words floating as vaguely as cotton, yet achieving a purpose as precisely as an adding machine, summing up to his full satisfaction. But his purpose and the nature of his satisfaction had to be kept as carefully hidden from himself as they had been from others; and his sudden craving for pleasure was a dangerous breach.

The day had started with a small luncheon in the hotel suite of a visiting Argentinian legislator, where a few people of various nationalities had talked at leisurely length about the climate of Argentina, its soil, its resources, the needs of its people, the value of a dynamic, progressive attitude toward the future—and had mentioned, as the briefest topic of conversation, that Argentina would be declared a People's State within two weeks.