

me for, I thought: it was that I wanted you." He looked at her: "Dagny, you didn't intend it then, but what you were saying was that you wanted to sleep with me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Hank. Of course."

He held her eyes, then looked away. They were silent for a long time. He glanced at the soft twilight around them, then at the sparkle of two wine glasses on their table. "Dagny, in my youth, when I was working in the ore mines in Minnesota, I thought that I wanted to reach an evening like this. No, that was not what I was working for, and I didn't think of it often. But once in a while, on a winter night, when the stars were out and it was very cold, when I was tired, because I had worked two shifts, and wanted nothing on earth except to lie down and fall asleep right there, on the mine ledge-- I thought that some day I would sit in a place like this, where one drink of wine would cost more than my day's wages, and I would have earned the price of every minute of it and of every drop and of every flower on the table, and I would sit there for no purpose but my own amusement."

She asked, smiling. "With your mistress?"

She saw the shot of pain in his eyes and wished desperately that she had not said it.

"With . . . a woman," he answered. She knew the word he had not pronounced. He went on, his voice soft and steady: "When I became rich and saw what the rich did for their amusement, I thought that the place I had imagined, did not exist. I had not even imagined it too clearly. I did not know what it would be like, only what I would feel. I gave up expecting it years ago. But-- I feel it tonight."

He raised his glass, looking at her.

"Hank, I . . . I'd give up anything I've ever had in my life, except my being a . . . a luxury object of your amusement."

He saw her hand trembling as she held her glass. He said evenly, "I know it, dearest."

She sat shocked and still: he had never used that word before. He threw his head back and smiled the most brilliantly gay smile she had ever seen on his face.

"Your first moment of weakness, Dagny," he said.

She laughed and shook her head. He stretched his arm across the table and closed his hand over her naked shoulder, as if giving her an instant's support. Laughing softly, and as if by accident, she let her mouth brush against his fingers: it kept her face down for the one moment when he could have seen the brilliance of her eyes was tears.

When she looked up at him, her smile matched his—and the rest of the evening was their celebration—for all his years since the nights on the mine ledges—for all her years since the night of her first ball when, in desolate longing for an uncaptured vision of gaiety, she had wondered about the people who expected the lights and the flowers to make them brilliant.

"Isn't there . . . in what we're taught . . . some error that's vicious and very important?" She thought of his words, as she lay in an

armchair of her living room, on a dismal evening of spring, waiting for him to come. . . . Just a little farther, my darling—she thought—look a little farther and you'll be free of that error and of all the wasted pain you never should have had to carry. . . . But she felt that she, too, had not seen the whole of the distance, and she wondered what were the steps left for her to discover. . . .

Walking through the darkness of the streets, on his way to her apartment, Rearden kept his hands in his coat pockets and his arms pressed to his sides, because he felt that he did not want to touch anything or brush against anyone. He had never experienced it before—this sense of revulsion that was not aroused by any particular object, but seemed to flood everything around him, making the city seem sodden. He could understand disgust for any one thing, and he could fight that thing with the healthy indignation of knowing that it did not belong in the world; but this was new to him—this feeling that the world was a loathsome place where he did not want to belong.

He had held a conference with the producers of copper, who had just been garroted by a set of directives that would put them out of existence in another year. He had had no advice to give them, no solution to offer; his ingenuity, which had made him famous as the man who would always find a way to keep production going, had not been able to discover a way to save them. But they had all known that there was no way; ingenuity was a virtue of the mind—and in the issue confronting them, the mind had been discarded as irrelevant long ago “It's a deal between the boys in Washington and the importers of copper,” one of the men had said, “mainly d'Anconia Copper.”

This was only a small, extraneous stab of pain, he thought, a feeling of disappointment in an expectation he had never had the right to expect; he should have known that this was just what a man like Francisco d'Anconia would do—and he wondered angrily why he felt as if a bright, brief flame had died somewhere in a lightless world.

He did not know whether the impossibility of acting had given him this sense of loathing, or whether the loathing had made him lose the desire to act. It's both, he thought; a desire presupposes the possibility of action to achieve it; action presupposes a goal which is worth achieving. If the only goal possible was to wheedle a precarious moment's favor from men who held guns, then neither action nor desire could exist any longer.

Then could life?—he asked himself indifferently. Life, he thought, had been defined as motion; man's life was purposeful motion; what was the state of a being to whom purpose and motion were denied, a being held in chains but left to breathe and to see all the magnificence of the possibilities he could have reached, left to scream “Why?” and to be shown the muzzle of a gun as sole explanation? He shrugged, walking on; he did not care even to find an answer.

He observed, indifferently, the devastation wrought by his own indifference. No matter how hard a struggle he had lived through in the past, he had never reached the ultimate ugliness of abandoning the will to act. In moments of suffering, he had never let pain win