He saw only the faintest contraction of her mouth, but he knew that the question was like a blow across an open wound. Yet she answered quietly, "I did."

"For this kind of end?"

"For the men who did not hold out, would not fight and gave up."

"Don't you see that no other end was possible?"

"No."

"How much injustice are you willing to take?"

"As much as I'm able to fight."

"What will you do now? Tomorrow?"

She said calmly, looking straight at him with the faintly proud look of stressing her calm, "Start to tear it up."

"What?"

"The John Galt Line. Start to tear it up as good as with my own hands with my own mind, by my own instructions. Get it ready to be closed, then tear it up and use its pieces to reinforce the transcontinental track. There's a lot of work to do. It will keep me busy." The calm cracked a little, in the faintest change of her voice: "You know, I'm looking forward to it. I'm glad that I'll have to do it myself. That's why Nat Taggart worked all that night just to keep going. It's not so bad as long as there's something one can do. And I'll know, at least, that I'm saving the main line."

"Dagny," he asked very quietly—and she wondered what made her feel that he looked as if his personal fate hung on her answer, "what if it were the main line that you had to dismember?"

She answered irresistibly, "Then I'd let the last engine run over me!"—but added, "No. That's just self-pity. I wouldn't."

He said gently, "I know you wouldn't. But you'd wish you could."

"Yes."

He smiled, not looking at her; it was a mocking smile, but it was a smile of pain and the mockery was directed at himself. She wondered what made her certain of it; but she knew his face so well that she would always know what he felt, even though she could not guess his reasons any longer. She knew his face as well, she thought, as she knew every line of his body, as she could still see it, as she was suddenly aware of it under his clothes, a few feet away, in the crowding intimacy of the booth. He turned to look at her and some sudden change in his eyes made her certain that he knew what she was thinking. He looked away and picked up his glass.

"Well—" he said, "to Nat Taggart."

"And to Sebastián d'Anconia?" she asked—then regretted it, because it had sounded like mockery, which she had not intended.

But she saw a look of odd, bright clarity in his eyes and he answered firmly, with the faintly proud smile of stressing his firmness, "Yes—and to Sebastián d'Anconia."

Her hand trembled a little and she spilled a few drops on the square of paper lace that lay on the dark, shining plastic of the table. She watched him empty his glass in a single gesture; the brusque, brief movement of his hand made it look like the gesture of some solemn pledge.

She thought suddenly that this was the first time in twelve years that he had come to her of his own choice.

He had acted as if he were confidently in control, as if his confidence were a transfusion to let her recapture hers, he had given her no time to wonder that they should be here together. Now she felt, unaccountably, that the reins he had held were gone. It was only the silence of a few blank moments and the motionless outline of his forehead, cheekbone and mouth, as he sat with his face turned away from her—but she felt as if it were he who was now struggling for something he had to recapture.

She wondered what had been his purpose tonight—and noticed that he had, perhaps, accomplished it: he had carried her over the worst moment, he had given her an invaluable defense against despair—the knowledge that a living intelligence had heard her and understood. But why had he wanted to do it? Why had he cared about her hour of despair—after the years of agony he had given her? Why had it mattered to him how she would take the death of the John Galt Line? She noticed that this was the question she had not asked him in the lobby of the Taggart Building.

This was the bond between them, she thought: that she would never be astonished if he came when she needed him most, and that he would always know when to come. This was the danger: that she would trust him, even while knowing that it could be nothing but some new kind of trap, even while remembering that he would always betray those who trusted him.

He sat, leaning forward with his arms crossed on the table, looking straight ahead. He said suddenly, not turning to her:

"I am thinking of the fifteen years that Sebastián d'Anconia had to wait for the woman he loved: He did not know whether he would ever find her again, whether she would survive . . . whether she would wait for him. But he knew that she could not live through his battle and that he could not call her to him until it was won. So he waited, holding his love in the place of the hope which he had no right to hold. But when he carried her across the threshold of his house, as the first Señora d'Anconia of a new world, he knew that the battle was won, that they were free, that nothing threatened her and nothing would ever hurt her again."

In the days of their passionate happiness, he had never given her a hint that he would come to think of her as Señora d'Anconia. For one moment, she wondered whether she had known what she had meant to him. But the moment ended in an invisible shudder: she would not believe that the past twelve years could allow the things she was hearing to be possible. This was the new trap, she thought.

"Francisco," she asked, her voice hard, "what have you done to Hank Rearden?"

He looked startled that she should think of that name at that moment. "Why?" he asked.

"He told me once that you were the only man he'd ever liked. But last time I saw him, he said he would kill you on sight."

"He did not tell you why?"

"No."

"He told you nothing about it?"

"No." She saw him smiling strangely, a smile of sadness, gratitude and longing. "I warned him that you would hurt him—when he told me that you were the only man he liked."

His words came like a sudden explosion: "He was the only man—with one exception—to whom I could have given my life!"

"Who is the exception?"

"The man to whom I have."

"What do you mean?"

He shook his head, as if he had said more than he intended, and did not answer.

"What did you do to Rearden?"

"I'll tell you some time. Not now."

"Is that what you always do to those who . . . mean a great deal to you?"

He looked at her with a smile that had the luminous sincerity of innocence and pain. "You know," he said gently, "I could say that that is what they always do to me." He added, "But I won't. The actions—and the knowledge—were mine."

He stood up. "Shall we go? I'll take you home."

She rose and he held her coat for her: it was a wide, loose garment, and his hands guided it to enfold her body. She felt his arm remain about her shoulders a moment longer than he intended her to notice.

She glanced back at him. But he was standing oddly still, staring intently down at the table. In rising, they had brushed aside the mats of paper lace and she saw an inscription cut into the plastic of the table top. Attempts had been made to erase it, but the inscription remained, as the graven voice of some unknown drunk's despair: "Who is John Galt?"

With a brusque movement of anger, she flicked the mat back to cover the words. He chuckled.

"I can answer it," he said. "I can tell you who is John Galt."

"Really? Everybody seems to know him, but they never tell the same story twice."

"They're all true, though—all the stories you've heard about him."

"Well, what's yours? Who is he?"

"John Galt is Prometheus who changed his mind. After centuries of being torn by vultures in payment for having brought to men the fire of the gods, he broke his chains—and he withdrew his fire—until the day when men withdraw their vultures."

* *

The band of crossties swept in wide curves around granite corners, clinging to the mountainsides of Colorado. Dagny walked down the ties, keeping her hands in her coat pockets, and her eyes on the meaningless distance ahead; only the familiar movement of straining her steps to the spacing of the ties gave her the physical sense of an action pertaining to a railroad.

A gray cotton, which was neither quite fog nor clouds, hung in sloppy wads between sky and mountains, making the sky look like an old mattress spilling its stuffing down the sides of the peaks. A crusted snow covered the ground, belonging neither to winter nor to