

"If you weren't, you'd know that it's not this valley, but the view of life held by men in the outer world that is a prehistorical mirage."

They heard the sound of the motor and saw the car stopping below, in front of the house. She noticed the swiftness with which he rose to his feet at the sight of Galt in the car; if it were not for the obvious personal eagerness, it would have looked like an instinctive gesture of military respect.

She noticed the way Galt stopped, when he entered and saw his visitor. She noticed that Galt smiled, but that his voice was oddly low, almost solemn, as if weighted with unconfessed relief, when he said very quietly, "Hello."

"Hi, John," said the visitor gaily.

She noticed that their handshake came an instant too late and lasted an instant too long, like the handshake of men who had not been certain that their previous meeting would not be their last.

Galt turned to her. "Have you met?" he asked, addressing them both.

"Not exactly," said the visitor.

"Miss Taggart, may I present Ragnar Danneskjöld?"

She knew what her face had looked like, when she heard Danneskjöld's voice as from a great distance: "You don't have to be frightened, Miss Taggart. I'm not dangerous to anyone in Galt's Gulch."

She could only shake her head, before she recaptured her voice to say, "It's not what you're doing to anyone . . . it's what they're doing to you. . . ."

His laughter swept her out of her moment's stupor. "Be careful, Miss Taggart. If that's how you're beginning to feel, you won't remain a scab for long." He added, "But you ought to start by adopting the right things from the people in Galt's Gulch, not their mistakes, they've spent twelve years worrying about me--needlessly." He glanced at Galt.

"When did you get in?" asked Galt.

"Late last night."

"Sit down. You're going to have breakfast with us."

"But where's Francisco? Why isn't he here yet?"

"I don't know," said Galt, frowning slightly. "I asked at the airport, just now. Nobody's heard from him."

As she turned to the kitchen, Galt moved to follow. "No," she said, "it's my job today."

"Let me help you."

"This is the place where one doesn't ask for help, isn't it?"

He smiled. "That's right."

She had never experienced the pleasure of motion, of walking as if her feet had no weight to carry, as if the support of the cane in her hand were merely a superfluous touch of elegance, the pleasure of feeling her steps trace swift, straight lines, of sensing the faultless, spontaneous precision of her gestures—as she experienced it while placing their food on the table in front of the two men. Her bearing told them that she knew they were watching her—she held her head like an actress on a stage, like a woman in a ballroom, like the winner of a silent contest.

"Francisco will be glad to know that it's you who were his stand-in today," said Danneskjöld, when she joined them at the table.

"His what?"

"You see, today is June first, and the three of us—John, Francisco and I—have had breakfast together on every June first for twelve years."

"Here?"

"Not when we started. But here, ever since this house was built eight years ago." He shrugged, smiling. "For a man who has more centuries of tradition behind him than I have, it's odd that Francisco should be the first to break our own tradition."

"And Mr. Galt?" she asked. "How many centuries does he have behind him?"

"John? None at all. None behind him—but all of those ahead."

"Never mind the centuries," said Galt. "Tell me what sort of year you've had behind you. Lost any men?"

"No."

"Lost any of your time?"

"You mean, was I wounded? No. I haven't had a scratch since that one time, ten years ago, when I was still an amateur, which you ought to forget by now. I wasn't in any danger whatever, this year—in fact, I was much more safe than if I were running a small-town drugstore under Directive 10-289."

"Lost any battles?"

"No. The losses were all on the other side, this year. The looters lost most of their ships to me—and most of their men to you. You've had a good year, too, haven't you? I know, I've kept track of it. Since our last breakfast together, you got everyone you wanted from the state of Colorado, and a few others besides, such as Ken Danagger, who was a great prize to get. But let me tell you about a still greater one, who is almost yours. You're going to get him soon, because he's hanging by a thin thread and is just about ready to fall at your feet. He's a man who saved my life—so you can see how far he's gone."

Galt leaned back, his eyes narrowing. "So you weren't in any danger whatever, were you?"

Danneskjöld laughed. "Oh, I took a slight risk. It was worth it. It was the most enjoyable encounter I've ever had. I've been waiting to tell you about it in person. It's a story you'll want to hear. Do you know who the man was? Hank Rearden. I—"

"No!"

It was Galt's voice; it was a command; the brief snap of sound had a tinge of violence neither of them had ever heard from him before.

"What?" asked Danneskjöld softly, incredulously.

"Don't tell me about it now."

"But you've always said that Hank Rearden was the one man you wanted to see here most."

"I still do. But you'll tell me later."

She studied Galt's face intently, but she could find no clue, only a closed, impersonal look, either of determination or of control, that tightened the skin of his cheekbones and the line of his mouth. No

matter what he knew about her, she thought, the only knowledge that could explain this, was a knowledge he had had no way of acquiring.

"You've met Hank Rearden?" she asked, turning to Danneskjöld.
"And he saved your life?"

"Yes."

"I want to hear about it."

"I don't," said Galt.

"Why not?"

"You're not one of us, Miss Taggart."

"I see." She smiled, with a faint touch of defiance. "Were you thinking that I might prevent you from getting Hank Rearden?"

"No, that was not what I was thinking."

She noticed that Danneskjöld was studying Galt's face, as if he too, found the incident inexplicable. Galt held his glance, deliberately and openly, as if challenging him to find the explanation and promising that he would fail. She knew that Danneskjöld had failed, when she saw a faint crease of humor softening Galt's eyelids.

"What else," asked Galt, "have you accomplished this year?"

"I've defied the law of gravitation."

"You've always done that. In what particular form now?"

"In the form of a flight from mid-Atlantic to Colorado in a plane loaded with gold beyond the safety point of its capacity. Wait till Midas sees the amount I have to deposit. My customers, this year will become richer by— Say, have you told Miss Taggart that she's one of my customers?"

"No, not yet. You may tell her, if you wish."

"I'm— What did you say I am?" she asked.

"Don't be shocked, Miss Taggart," said Danneskjöld. "And don't object. I'm used to objections. I'm a sort of freak here, anyway. None of them approve of my particular method of fighting our battle. John doesn't, Dr. Akston doesn't. They think that my life is too valuable for it. But, you see, my father was a bishop—and of all his teachings there was only one sentence that I accepted. 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.'"

"What do you mean?"

"That violence is not practical. If my fellow men believe that the force of the combined tonnage of their muscles is a practical means to rule me—let them learn the outcome of a contest in which there's nothing but brute force on one side, and force ruled by a mind, on the other. Even John grants me that in our age I had the moral right to choose the course I've chosen. I am doing just what he is doing—only in my own way. He is withdrawing man's spirit from the looters. I'm withdrawing the products of man's spirit. He is depriving them of reason, I'm depriving them of wealth. He is draining the soul of the world, I'm draining its body. His is the lesson they have to learn only I'm impatient and I'm hastening their scholastic progress. But like John, I'm simply complying with their moral code and refusing to grant them a double standard at my expense. Or at Rearden's expense. Or at yours."

"What are you talking about?"