

doing, yet it's horror that I feel—admiration and horror, at the same time, You, the heir of the d'Anconias, who could have surpassed all his ancestors of the miraculous hand that produced, you're turning your matchless ability to the job of destruction. And I—I'm playing with cobblestones and shingling a roof, while a transcontinental railroad system is collapsing in the hands of congenital ward heelers. Yet you and I were the kind who determine the fate of the world. If this is what we let it come to, then it must have been our own guilt. But I can't see the nature of our error."

"Yes, Dagny, it *was* our own guilt."

"Because we didn't work hard enough?"

"Because we worked too hard—and charged too little."

"What do you mean?"

"We never demanded the one payment that the world owed us—and we let our best reward go to the worst of men. The error was made centuries ago, it was made by Sebastián d'Anconia, by Nat Taggart, by every man who fed the world and received no thanks in return. You don't know what is right any longer? Dagny, this is not a battle over material goods. It's a moral crisis, the greatest the world has ever faced and the last. Our age is the climax of centuries of evil. We must put an end to it, once and for all, or perish—we, the men of the mind. It was our own guilt. We produced the wealth of the world—but we let our enemies write its moral code."

"But we never accepted their code. We lived by our own standards."

"Yes—and paid ransoms for it! Ransoms in matter and in spirit—in money, which our enemies received, but did not deserve, and in honor, which we deserved, but did not receive. *That* was our guilt—that we were willing to pay. We kept mankind alive, yet we allowed men to despise us and to worship our destroyers. We allowed them to worship incompetence and brutality, the recipients and the dispensers of the unearned. By accepting punishment, not for any sins, but for our virtues, we betrayed our code and made theirs possible. Dagny, theirs is the morality of kidnappers. They use your love of virtue as a hostage. They know that you'll bear anything in order to work and produce, because you know that achievement is man's highest moral purpose, that he can't exist without it, and your love of virtue is your love of life. They count on you to assume any burden. They count on you to feel that no effort is too great in the service of your love. Dagny, your enemies are destroying you by means of your own power. Your generosity and your endurance are their only tools. Your unrequited rectitude is the only hold they have upon you. They know it. You don't. The day when you'll discover it is the only thing they dread. You must learn to understand them. You won't be free of them, until you do. But when you do, you'll reach such a stage of rightful anger that you'll blast every rail of Taggart Transcontinental, rather than let it serve them!"

"But to leave it to them!" she moaned. "To abandon it . . . To abandon Taggart Transcontinental . . . when it's . . . it's almost like a living person . . ."

"It was. It isn't any longer. Leave it to them. It won't do them

any good. Let it go. We don't need it. We can rebuild it. They can't. We'll survive without it. They won't."

"But we, brought down to renouncing and giving up!"

"Dagny, we who've been called 'materialists' by the killers of the human spirit, we're the only ones who know how little value or meaning there is in material objects as such, because we're the ones who create their value and meaning. We can afford to give them up, for a short while, in order to redeem something much more precious. We are the soul, of which railroads, copper mines, steel mills and oil wells are the body--and they are living entities that beat day and night, like our hearts, in the sacred function of supporting human life, but only so long as they remain our body, only so long as they remain the expression, the reward and the property of achievement. Without us, they are corpses and their sole product is poison, not wealth or food, the poison of disintegration that turns men into hordes of scavengers. Dagny, learn to understand the nature of your own power and you'll understand the paradox you now see around you. You do not have to depend on any material possessions, they depend on you, you create them, you own the one and only tool of production. Wherever you are, you will always be able to produce. But the looters--by their own stated theory--are in desperate, permanent, congenital need and at the blind mercy of matter. Why don't you take them at their word? They need railroads, factories, mines, motors, which they cannot make or run. Of what use will your railroad be to them without you? Who held it together? Who kept it alive? Who saved it, time and time again? Was it your brother James? Who fed him? Who fed the looters? Who produced their weapons? Who gave them the means to enslave you? The impossible spectacle of shabby little incompetents holding control over the products of genius--who made it possible? Who supported your enemies, who forged your chains, who destroyed your achievement?"

The motion that threw her upright was like a silent cry. He shot to his feet with the stored abruptness of a spring uncoiling, his voice driving on in merciless triumph:

"You're beginning to see, aren't you? Dagny! Leave them the carcass of that railroad, leave them all the rusted rails and rotted ties and gutted engines--but don't leave them your mind! Don't leave them your mind! The fate of the world rests on that decision!"

"Ladies and gentlemen," said the panic-pregnant voice of a radio announcer, breaking off the chords of the symphony, "we interrupt this broadcast to bring you a special news bulletin. The greatest disaster in railroad history occurred in the early hours of the morning on the main line of Taggart Transcontinental, at Winston, Colorado, demolishing the famous Taggart Tunnel!"

Her scream sounded like the screams that had rung out in the one last moment in the darkness of the tunnel. Its sound remained with him through the rest of the broadcast--as they both ran to the radio in the cabin and stood, in equal terror, her eyes staring at the radio, his eyes watching her face.

"The details of the story were obtained from Luke Beal, fireman of the Taggart luxury main liner, the Comet, who was found uncon-