

directors, but by any unshaved humanitarian in any basement beer joint, by any face pudgy with malice, who preached that virtue must be penalized for being virtue, that the purpose of ability is to serve incompetence, that man has no right to exist except for the sake of others. . . . I knew it. I saw no way to fight it. John found the way. There were just the two of us with him, the night when we came to New York in answer to his call, Ragnar and I. He told us what we had to do and what sort of men we had to reach. He had quit the Twentieth Century. He was living in a garret in a slum neighborhood. He stepped to the window and pointed at the skyscrapers of the city. He said that we had to extinguish the lights of the world, and when we would see the lights of New York go out, we would know that our job was done. He did not ask us to join him at once. He told us to think it over and to weigh everything it would do to our lives. I gave him my answer on the morning of the second day, and Ragnar a few hours later, in the afternoon. . . . Dagny, that was the morning after our last night together. I had seen, in a manner of vision that I couldn't escape, what it was that I had to fight for. It was for the way you looked that night, for the way you talked about your railroad—for the way you had looked when we tried to see the skyline of New York from the top of a rock over the Hudson—I had to save you, to clear the way for you, to let you find your city—not to let you stumble the years of your life away, struggling on through a poisoned fog, with your eyes still held straight ahead, still looking as they had looked in the sunlight, struggling on to find, at the end of your road, not the towers of a city, but a fat, soggy, mindless cripple performing his enjoyment of life by means of swallowing the gin *your* life had gone to pay for! *You*—to know no joy in order that *he* may know it? *You*—to serve as fodder for the pleasure of others? *You*—as the means for the subhuman as the end? Dagny, that was what I saw and that was what I couldn't let them do to you! Not to you, not to any child who had your kind of look when he faced the future, not to any man who had your spirit and was able to experience a moment of being proudly, guiltlessly, confidently, joyously alive. *That* was my love, that state of the human spirit, and I left you to fight for it, and I knew that if I were to lose you, it was still *you* that I would be winning with every year of the battle. But you see it now, don't you? You've seen this valley. It's the place we set out to reach when we were children, you and I. We've reached it. What else can I ask for now? Just to see you here—did John say you're still a scab?—oh well, it's only a matter of time, but you'll be one of us, because you've always been, if you don't see it fully, we'll wait, I don't care—so long as you're alive, so long as I don't have to go on flying over the Rockies, looking for the wreckage of your plane!"

She gasped a little, realizing why he had not come to the valley on time.

He laughed. "Don't look like that. Don't look at me as if I were a wound that you're afraid to touch."

"Francisco, I've hurt you in so many different ways—"

"No! No, you haven't hurt me—and he hasn't either, don't say

anything about it, it's he who's hurt, but we'll save him and he'll come here, too, where he belongs, and he'll know, and then he, too, will be able to laugh about it. Dagny, I didn't expect you to wait, I didn't hope, I knew the chance I'd taken, and if it had to be anyone, I'm glad it's he."

She closed her eyes, pressing her lips together not to moan.

"Darling, don't! Don't you see that I've accepted it?"

But it isn't—she thought—it isn't he, and I can't tell you the truth, because it's a man who might never hear it from me and whom I might never have.

"Francisco, I did love you—" she said, and caught her breath, shocked, realizing that she had not intended to say it and, simultaneously, that this was not the tense she had wanted to use.

"But you do," he said calmly, smiling. "You still love me—even if there's one expression of it that you'll always feel and want, but will not give me any longer. I'm still what I was, and you'll always see it, and you'll always grant me the same response, even if there's a greater one that you grant to another man. No matter what you feel for him, it will not change what you feel for me, and it won't be treason to either, because it comes from the same root, it's the same payment in answer to the same values. No matter what happens in the future, we'll always be what we were to each other, you and I, because you'll always love me."

"Francisco," she whispered, "do you know that?"

"Of course. Don't you understand it now? Dagny, every form of happiness is one, every desire is driven by the same motor—by our love for a single value, for the highest potentiality of our own existence—and every achievement is an expression of it. Look around you. Do you see how much is open to us here, on an unobstructed earth? Do you see how much I am free to do, to experience, to achieve? Do you see that all of it is part of what you are to me—as I am part of it for you? And if I'll see you smile with admiration at a new copper smelter that I built, it will be another form of what I felt when I lay in bed beside you. Will I want to sleep with you? Desperately. Will I envy the man who does? Sure. But what does that matter? It's so much—just to have you here, to love you and to be alive."

Her eyes lowered, her face stern, holding her head bowed as in an act of reverence, she said slowly, as if fulfilling a solemn promise. "Will you forgive me?"

He looked astonished, then chuckled gaily, remembering, and answered, "Not yet. There's nothing to forgive, but I'll forgive it when you join us."

He rose, he drew her to her feet—and when his arms closed about her, their kiss was the summation of their past, its end and their seal of acceptance.

Galt turned to them from across the living room, when they came out. He had been standing at a window, looking at the valley—and she felt certain that he had stood there all that time. She saw his eyes studying their faces, his glance moving slowly from one to the