

ing, amusement and pain. He asked, his voice gravely gentle, "Do you think that you can still serve him—that kind of man—by running the railroad?"

"Yes."

"All right, Dagny. I won't try to stop you. So long as you still think that, nothing can stop you, or should. You will stop on the day when you'll discover that your work has been placed in the service, not of that man's life, but of his destruction."

"Francisco!" It was a cry of astonishment and despair. "You do understand it, you know what I mean by that kind of man, you see him, too!"

"Oh yes," he said simply, casually, looking at some point in space within the room, almost as if he were seeing a real person. He added, "Why should you be astonished? You said that we were of his kind once, you and I. We still are. But one of us has betrayed him."

"Yes," she said sternly, "one of us has. We cannot serve him by renunciation."

"We cannot serve him by making terms with his destroyers."

"I'm not making terms with them. They need me. They know it. It's my terms that I'll make them accept."

"By playing a game in which they gain benefits in exchange for harming you?"

"If I can keep Taggart Transcontinental in existence, it's the only benefit I want. What do I care if they make me pay ransoms? Let them have what they want. I'll have the railroad."

He smiled. "Do you think so? Do you think that their need of you is your protection? Do you think that you can give them what they want? No, you won't quit until you see, of your own sight and judgment, what it is that they really want. You know, Dagny, we were taught that some things belong to God and others to Caesar. Perhaps their God would permit it. But the man you say we're serving—he does not permit it. He permits no divided allegiance, no war between your mind and your body, no gulf between your values and your actions, no tributes to Caesar. He permits no Caesars."

"For twelve years," she said softly. "I would have thought it inconceivable that there might come a day when I would have to beg your forgiveness on my knees. Now I think it's possible. If I come to see that you're right, I will. But not until then."

"You will. But not on your knees."

He was looking at her, as if he were seeing her body as she stood before him, even though his eyes were directed at her face, and his glance told her what form of atonement and surrender he was seeing in the future. She saw the effort he made to look away, his hope that she had not seen his glance or understood it, his silent struggle, betrayed by the tension of a few muscles under the skin of his face—the face she knew so well.

"Until then, Dagny, remember that we're enemies. I didn't want to tell you this, but you're the first person who almost stepped into heaven and came back to earth. You've glimpsed too much, so you have to know this clearly. It's you that I'm fighting, not your brother James or Wesley Mouch. It's you that I have to defeat. I am out to

end all the things that are most precious to you right now. While you'll struggle to save Taggart Transcontinental, I will be working to destroy it. Don't ever ask me for help or money. You know my reasons. Now you may hate me—as, from your stand, you should."

She raised her head a little, there was no perceptible change in her posture, it was no more than her awareness of her own body and of its meaning to him, but for the length of one sentence she stood as a woman, the suggestion of defiance coming only from the faintly stressed spacing of her words: "And what will it do to you?"

He looked at her, in full understanding, but neither admitting nor denying the confession she wanted to tear from him. "That is no one's concern but mine," he answered.

It was she who weakened, but realized, while saying it, that this was still more cruel: "I don't hate you. I've tried to, for years, but I never will, no matter what we do, either one of us."

"I know it," he said, his voice low, so that she did not hear the pain, but felt it within herself as it by direct reflection from him.

"Francisco!" she cried, in desperate defense of him against herself. "How can you do what you're doing?"

"By the grace of my love"—for you, said his eyes—"for the man," said his voice, "who did not perish in your catastrophe and who will never perish."

She stood silently still for a moment, as if in respectful acknowledgment.

"I wish I could spare you what you're going to go through," he said, the gentleness of his voice saying: It's not me that you should pity. "But I can't. Every one of us has to travel that road by his own steps. But it's the same road."

"Where does it lead?"

He smiled, as if softly closing a door on the questions that he would not answer. "To Atlantis," he said.

"What?" she asked, startled.

"Don't you remember?—the lost city that only the spirits of heroes can enter."

The connection that struck her suddenly had been struggling in her mind since morning, like a dim anxiety she had had no time to identify. She had known it, but she had thought only of his own fate and his personal decision, she had thought of him as acting alone. Now she remembered a wider danger and sensed the vast, undefined shape of the enemy she was facing.

"You're one of them," she said slowly, "aren't you?"

"Of whom?"

"Was it *you* in Ken Danagger's office?"

He smiled. "No." But she noted that he did not ask what she meant.

"Is there—you would know it—is there actually a destroyer loose in the world?"

"Of course."

"Who is it?"

"You."

She shrugged; her face was growing hard. "The men who've quit, are they still alive or dead?"

"They're dead—as far as you're concerned. But there's to be a Second Renaissance in the world, I'll wait for it."

"No!" The sudden violence of her voice was in personal answer to him, to one of the two things he had wanted her to hear in his words. "No, don't wait for me!"

"I'll always wait for you, no matter what we do, either one of us."

The sound they heard was the turning of a key in the lock of the entrance door. The door opened and Hank Rearden came in.

He stopped briefly on the threshold, then walked slowly into the living room, his hand slipping the key into his pocket.

She knew that he had seen Francisco's face before he had seen hers. He glanced at her, but his eyes came back to Francisco, as if this were the only face he was now able to see.

It was at Francisco's face that she was afraid to look. The effort she made to pull her glance along the curve of a few steps felt as if she were pulling a weight beyond her power. Francisco had risen to his feet, as if in the unhurried, automatic manner of a d'Anconia trained to the code of courtesy. There was nothing that Rearden could see in his face. But what she saw in it was worse than she had feared.

"What are you doing here?" asked Rearden, in the tone one would use to address a menial caught in a drawing room.

"I see that I have no right to ask you the same question," said Francisco. She knew what effort was required to achieve the clear, toneless quality of his voice. His eyes kept returning to Rearden's right hand, as if he were still seeing the key between his fingers.

"Then answer it," said Rearden.

"Hank, any questions you wish to ask should be asked of me," she said.

Rearden did not seem to see or hear her. "Answer it," he repeated.

"There is only one answer which you would have the right to demand," said Francisco, "so I will answer you that that is not the reason of my presence here."

"There is only one reason for your presence in the house of any woman," said Rearden. "And I mean, any woman—as far as you're concerned. Do you think that I believe it now, that confession of yours or anything you ever said to me?"

"I have given you grounds not to trust me, but none to include Miss Taggart."

"Don't tell me that you have no chance here, never had and never will. I know it. But that I should find you here on the first—"

"Hank, if you wish to accuse me—" she began, but Rearden whirled to her.

"God, no, Dagny, I don't! But you shouldn't be seen speaking to him. You shouldn't deal with him in any way. You don't know him. I do." He turned to Francisco. "What are you after? Are you hoping to include her among your kind of conquests or—"