innocently natural, non-boastful sense of their own value and as innocent a trust in any stranger's ability to recognize it, they had the eager curiosity that would venture anywhere with the certainty that life held nothing unworthy of or closed to discovery, and they looked as if, should they encounter malevolence, they would reject it contemptuously, not as dangerous, but as stupid, they would not accept it in bruised resignation as the law of existence.

"They represent my particular career, Miss Taggart," said the young mother in answer to her comment, wrapping a loaf of fresh bread and smiling at her across the counter. "They're the profession I've chosen to practice, which, in spite of all the guff about motherhood, one can't practice successfully in the outer world. I believe you've met my husband, he's the teacher of economics who works as linesman for Dick McNamara. You know, of course, that there can be no collective commitments in this valley and that families or relatives are not allowed to come here, unless each person takes the striker's oath by his own independent conviction. I came here, not merely for the sake of my husband's profession, but for the sake of my own. I came here in order to bring up my sons as human beings. I would not surrender them to the educational systems devised to stunt a child's brain, to convince him that reason is impotent, that existence is an irrational chaos with which he's unable to deal, and thus reduce him to a state of chronic terror. You marvel at the difference between my children and those outside, Miss Taggart? Yet the cause is so simple. The cause is that here, in Galt's Gulch, there's no person who would not consider it monstrous ever to confront a child with the slightest suggestion of the irrational."

She thought of the teachers whom the schools of the world had lost—when she looked at the three pupils of Dr. Akston, on the evening of their yearly reunion.

The only other guest he had invited was Kay Ludlow. The six of them sat in the back yard of his house, with the light of the sunset on their faces, and the floor of the valley condensing into a soft blue vapor far below.

She looked at his pupils, at the three pliant, agile figures half-stretched on canvas chairs in poses of relaxed contentment, dressed in slacks, windbreakers and open-collared shirts: John Galt, Francisco d'Anconia, Ragnar Danneskjöld.

"Don't be astonished, Miss Taggart," said Dr. Akston, smiling, "and don't make the mistake of thinking that these three pupils of mine are some sort of superhuman creatures. They're something much greater and more astounding than that: they're *normal men*—a thing the world has never seen—and their feat is that they managed to survive as such. It does take an exceptional mind and a still more exceptional integrity to remain untouched by the brain-destroying influences of the world's doctrines, the accumulated evil of centuries—to remain *human*, since the human is the rational."

She felt some new quality in Dr. Akston's attitude, some change in the sternness of his usual reserve; he seemed to include her in their circle, as if she were more than a guest. Francisco acted as if her presence at their reunion were natural and to be taken gaily for

granted. Galt's face gave no hint of any reaction; his manner was that of a courteous escort who had brought her here at Dr. Akston's request.

She noticed that Dr. Akston's eyes kept coming back to her, as if with the quiet pride of displaying his students to an appreciative observer. His conversation kept returning to a single theme, in the manner of a father who has found a listener interested in his most cherished subject:

"You should have seen them, when they were in college, Miss Taggart. You couldn't have found three boys 'conditioned' to such different backgrounds, but—conditioners be damned!—they must have picked one another at first sight, among the thousands on that campus. Francisco, the richest heir in the world—Ragnar, the European aristocrat—and John, the self-made man, self-made in every sense, out of nowhere, penniless, parentless, tie-less. Actually, he was the son of a gas-station mechanic at some forsaken crossroads in Ohio, and he had left home at the age of twelve to make his own way—but I've always thought of him as if he had come into the world like Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, who sprang forth from Jupiter's head, fully grown and fully armed. . . . I remember the day when I saw the three of them for the first time. They were sitting at the back of the classroom—I was giving a special course for postgraduate students, so difficult a course that few outsiders ever ventured to attend these particular lectures. Those three looked too young even for freshmen—they were sixteen at the time, as I learned later. At the end of that lecture, John got up to ask me a question. It was a question which, as a teacher, I would have been proud to hear from a student who'd taken six years of philosophy. It was a question pertaining to Plato's metaphysics, which Plato hadn't had the sense to ask of himself. I answered—and I asked John to come to my office after the lecture. He came—all three of them came—I saw the two others in my anteroom and let them in. I talked to them for an hour—then I cancelled all my appointments and talked to them for the rest of the day. After which, I arranged to let them take that course and receive their credits for it. They took the course. They got the highest grades in the class. . . .They were majoring in two subjects: physics and philosophy. Their choice amazed everybody but me: modern thinkers considered it unnecessary to perceive reality, and modern physicists considered it unnecessary to think. I knew better; what amazed me was that these children knew it, too. . . . Robert Stadler was head of the Department of Physics, as I was head of the Department of Philosophy. He and I suspended all rules and restrictions for these three students, we spared them all the routine, unessential courses, we loaded them with nothing but the hardest tasks, and we cleared their way to major in our two subjects within their four years. They *worked* for it. And, during those four years, they worked for their living, besides. Francisco and Ragnar were receiving allowances from their parents, John had nothing, but all three of them held part-time jobs to earn their own experience and money. Francisco worked in a copper foundry, John worked in a railroad roundhouse, and Ragnar—no, Miss Taggart, Ragnar was