

steel rail, there was no hope of obtaining an "emergency need" permission to buy Rearden Metal and no time to beg for it.

Rearden looked away from the headlines to the glow at the edge of the sky, which was the city of New York far ahead; his hands tightened on the wheel a little.

It was half past nine when he reached the city. Dagny's apartment was dark, when he let himself in with his key. He picked up the telephone and called her office. Her own voice answered: "Taggart Transcontinental."

"Don't you know it's a holiday?" he asked.

"Hello, Hank. Railroads have no holidays. Where are you calling from?"

"Your place."

"I'll be through in another half-hour."

"It's all right. Stay there. I'll come for you."

The anteroom of her office was dark, when he entered, except for the lighted glass cubbyhole of Eddie Willers. Eddie was closing his desk, getting ready to leave. He looked at Rearden, in puzzled astonishment.

"Good evening, Eddie. What is it that keeps you people so busy—the Rockland wreck?"

Eddie sighed. "Yes, Mr. Rearden."

"That's what I want to see Dagny about--about your rail."

"She's still here."

He started toward her door, when Eddie called after him hesitantly, "Mr. Rearden . . ."

He stopped. "Yes?"

"I wanted to say . . . because tomorrow is your trial . . . and whatever they do to you is supposed to be in the name of all the people . . . I just wanted to say that I . . . that it won't be in *my* name . . . even if there's nothing I can do about it, except to tell you . . . even if I know that that doesn't mean anything."

"It means much more than you suspect. Perhaps more than any of us suspect. Thanks, Eddie."

Dagny glanced up from her desk, when Rearden entered her office: he saw her watching him as he approached and he saw the look of weariness disappearing from her eyes. He sat down on the edge of the desk. She leaned back, brushing a strand of hair off her face, her shoulders relaxing under her thin white blouse.

"Dagny, there's something I want to tell you about the rail that you ordered. I want you to know this tonight."

She was watching him attentively; the expression of his face pulled hers into the same look of quietly solemn tension:

"I am supposed to deliver to Taggart Transcontinental, on February fifteenth, sixty thousand tons of rail, which is to give you three hundred miles of track. You will receive—for the same sum of money—eighty thousand tons of rail, which will give you five hundred miles of track. You know what material is cheaper and lighter than steel. Your rail will not be steel, it will be Rearden Metal. Don't argue, object or agree. I am not asking for your consent. You are not supposed to consent or to know anything about it. I am doing

this and I alone will be responsible. We will work it so that those on your staff who'll know that you've ordered steel, won't know that you've received Rearden Metal, and those who'll know that you've received Rearden Metal, won't know that you had no permit to buy it. We will tangle the bookkeeping in such a way that if the thing should ever blow up, nobody will be able to pin anything on anybody, except on me. They might suspect that I bribed someone on your staff, or they might suspect that you were in on it, but they won't be able to prove it. I want you to give me your word that you will never admit it, no matter what happens. It's *my* Metal, and if there are any chances to take, it's I who'll take them. I have been planning this from the day I received your order. I have ordered the copper for it, from a source which *will not* betray me. I did not intend to tell you about it till later, but I changed my mind. I want you to know it tonight—because I am going on trial tomorrow for the same kind of crime."

She had listened without moving. At his last sentence, he saw a faint contraction of her cheeks and lips; it was not quite a smile, but it gave him her whole answer: pain, admiration, understanding.

Then he saw her eyes becoming softer, more painfully, dangerously alive—he took her wrist, as if the tight grasp of his fingers and the severity of his glance were to give her the support she needed—and he said sternly, "Don't thank me—this is not a favor—I am doing it in order to be able to bear my work, or else I'll break like Ken Danagger."

She whispered, "All right, Hank. I won't thank you," the tone of her voice and the look of her eyes making it a lie by the time it was uttered.

He smiled. "Give me the word I asked."

She inclined her head. "I give you my word." He released her wrist. She added, not raising her head. "The only thing I'll say is that if they sentence you to jail tomorrow, I'll quit—without waiting for any destroyer to prompt me."

"You won't. And I don't think they'll sentence me to jail. I think they'll let me off very lightly. I have a hypothesis about it—I'll explain it to you afterwards, when I've put it to the test."

"What hypothesis?"

"Who is John Galt?" He smiled, and stood up. "That's all. We won't talk any further about my trial, tonight. You don't happen to have anything to drink in your office, have you?"

"No. But I think my traffic manager has some sort of a bar on one shelf of his filing closet."

"Do you think you could steal a drink for me, if he doesn't have it locked?"

"I'll try."

He stood looking at the portrait of Nat Taggart on the wall of her office—the portrait of a young man with a lifted head—until she returned, bringing a bottle of brandy and two glasses. He filled the glasses in silence.

"You know, Dagny, Thanksgiving was a holiday established by productive people to celebrate the success of their work."