

"If that is what you thought, why did you stay with me?"

She answered severely, "It's a question you have lost the right to ask."

"That's true," he said, thinking that only one conceivable reason, her love for him, could justify her answer.

"No, I'm not going to divorce you. Do you suppose that I will allow your romance with a floozy to deprive me of my home, my name, my social position? I shall preserve such pieces of my life as I can, whatever does not rest on so shoddy a foundation as your delirium. Make no mistake about it: I shall never give you a divorce. Whether you like it or not, you're married and you'll stay married."

"I will, if that is what you wish."

"And furthermore, I will not consider—incidentally, why don't you sit down?"

He remained standing. "Please say what you have to say."

"I will not consider any unofficial divorce, such as a separation. You may continue your love idyll in the subways and basements where it belongs, but in the eyes of the world I will expect you to remember that I am Mrs. Henry Rearden. You have always proclaimed such an exaggerated devotion to honesty—now let me see you be condemned to the life of the hypocrite that you really are. I will expect you to maintain your residence at the home which is officially yours, but will now be mine."

"If you wish—"

She leaned back loosely, in a manner of untidy relaxation, her legs spread apart, her arms resting in two strict parallels on the arms of the chair—like a judge who could permit himself to be sloppy.

"Divorce?" she said, chuckling coldly. "Did you think you'd get off as easily as that? Did you think you'd get by at the price of a few of your millions tossed off as alimony? You're so used to purchasing whatever you wish by the simple means of your dollars, that you cannot conceive of things that are non-commercial, non-negotiable, non-subject to any kind of trade. You're unable to believe that there may exist a person who feels no concern for money. You cannot imagine what *that* means. Well, I think you're going to learn. Oh yes, of course you'll agree to any demand I make, from now on. I want you to sit in that office of which you're so proud, in those precious mills of yours, and play the hero who works eighteen hours a day, the giant of industry who keeps the whole country going, the genius who is above the common herd of whining, lying, chiseling humanity. Then I want you to come home and face the only person who knows you for what you really are, who knows the actual value of your word, of your honor, of your integrity, of your vaunted self-esteem. I want you to face, in your own home, the one person who despises you and has the right to do so. I want you to look at me whenever you build another furnace, or pour another recordbreaking load of steel, or hear applause and admiration, whenever you feel proud of yourself, whenever you feel clean, whenever you feel drunk in the sense of your own greatness. I want you to look at me whenever you hear of some act of depravity, or feel anger at human corruption, or feel contempt for someone's knavery, or are the victim

of a new governmental extortion—to look and to know that you're no better, that you're superior to no one, that there's nothing you have the right to condemn. I want you to look at me and to learn the fate of the man who tried to build a tower to the sky, or the man who wanted to reach the sun on wings made of wax—or you, the man who wanted to hold himself as perfect!"

Somewhere outside of him and apart, as if he were reading it in a brain not his own, he observed the thought that there was some flaw in the scheme of the punishment she wanted him to bear, something wrong by its own terms, aside from its propriety or justice, some practical miscalculation that would demolish it all if discovered. He did not attempt to discover it. The thought went by as a moment's notation, made in cold curiosity, to be brought back in some distant future. There was nothing within him now with which to feel interest or to respond.

His own brain was numb with the effort to hold the last of his sense of justice against so overwhelming a tide of revulsion that it swamped Lillian out of human form, past all his pleas to himself that he had no right to feel it. If she was loathsome, he thought, it was he who had brought her to it; this was her way of taking pain—no one could prescribe the form of a human being's attempt to bear suffering—no one could blame—above all not he, who had caused it. But he saw no evidence of pain in her manner. Then perhaps the ugliness was the only means she could summon to hide it, he thought. Then he thought of nothing except of withstanding the revulsion for the length of the next moment and of the next

When she stopped speaking, he asked, "Have you finished?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Then you had better take the train home now."

When he undertook the motions necessary to remove his evening clothes, he discovered that his muscles felt as if he were at the end of a long day of physical labor. His starched shirt was limp with sweat. There was neither thought nor feeling left in him, nothing but a sense that merged the remnants of both, the sense of congratulation upon the greatest victory he had ever demanded of himself: that Lillian had walked out of the hotel suite alive

* *

Entering Rearden's office, Dr. Floyd Ferris wore the expression of a man so certain of the success of his quest that he could afford a benevolent smile. He spoke with a smooth, cheerful assurance; Rearden had the impression that it was the assurance of a cardsharp who has spent a prodigious effort in memorizing every possible variation of the pattern, and is now safe in the knowledge that every card in the deck is marked.

"Well, Mr. Rearden," he said, by way of greeting, "I didn't know that even a hardened hound of public functions and shaker of famous hands, like myself, could still get a thrill out of meeting an eminent man, but that's what I feel right now, believe it or not."

"How do you do," said Rearden.

Dr. Ferris sat down and made a few remarks about the colors of the leaves in the month of October, as he had observed them by the