

"Don't you know what night I am thinking of, just as you are?"

"Yes . . ." she whispered.

"That was the night I gave up d'Anconia Copper."

Slowly, with a long effort, she moved her head to glance up at him. His face had the expression she had seen then, on that next morning, twelve years ago: the look of a smile, though he was not smiling, the quiet look of victory over pain, the look of a man's pride in the price he paid and in that which made it worth paying.

"But you didn't give it up," she said. "You didn't quit. You're still the President of d'Anconia Copper, only it means nothing to you now."

"It means as much to me now as it did that night."

"Then how can you let it go to pieces?"

"Dagny, you're more fortunate than I. Taggart Transcontinental is a delicate piece of precision machinery. It will not last long without you. It cannot be run by slave labor. They will mercifully destroy it for you and you won't have to see it serving the looters. But copper mining is a simpler job. D'Anconia Copper could have lasted for generations of looters and slaves. Crudely, miserably, ineptly—but it could have lasted and helped them to last. I had to destroy it myself."

"You—what?"

"I am destroying d'Anconia Copper, consciously, deliberately, by plan and by my own hand. I have to plan it as carefully and work as hard as if I were producing a fortune—in order not to let them notice it and stop me, in order not to let them seize the mines until it is too late. All the effort and energy I had hoped to spend on d'Anconia Copper, I'm spending them, only . . . only it's not to make it grow. I shall destroy every last bit of it and every last penny of my fortune and every ounce of copper that could feed the looters. I shall not leave it as I found it—I shall leave it as Sebastián d'Anconia found it—then let them try to exist without him or me!"

"Francisco!" she screamed. "How could you make yourself do it?"

"By the grace of the same love as yours," he answered quietly, "my love for d'Anconia Copper, for the spirit of which it was the shape. Was—and, some day, will be again."

She sat still, trying to grasp all the implications of what she now grasped only as the numbness of shock. In the silence, the music of the radio symphony went on, and the rhythm of the chords reached her like the slow, solemn pounding of steps, while she struggled to see at once the whole progression of twelve years: the tortured boy who called for help on her breasts—the man who sat on the floor of a drawing room, playing marbles and laughing at the destruction of great industries—the man who cried, "My love, I can't!" while refusing to help her—the man who drank a toast, in the dim booth of a barroom, to the years which Sebastián d'Anconia had had to wait. . . .

"Francisco . . . of all the guesses I tried to make about you . . . I never thought of it . . . I never thought that you were one of those men who had quit . . ."

"I was one of the first of them."

"I thought that they always vanished . . ."

"Well, hadn't I? Wasn't it the worst of what I did to you—that I left you looking at a cheap playboy who was not the Francisco d'Anconia you had known?"

"Yes . . ." she whispered, "only the worst was that I couldn't believe it . . . I never did . . . It was Francisco d'Anconia that I kept seeing every time I saw you. . . ."

"I know. And I know what it did to you. I tried to help you understand, but it was too soon to tell you. Dagny, if I had told you—that night or the day when you came to damn me for the San Sebastián Mines—that I was not an aimless loafer, that I was out to speed up the destruction of everything we had held sacred together, the destruction of d'Anconia Copper, of Taggart Transcontinental, of Wyatt Oil, of Rearden Steel—would you have found it easier to take?"

"Harder," she whispered. "I'm not sure I can take it, even now. Neither your kind of renunciation nor my own . . . But, Francisco"—she threw her head back suddenly to look up at him—"if this was your secret, then of all the hell you had to take, I was—"

"Oh yes, my darling, yes, *you* were the worst of it!" It was a desperate cry, its sound of laughter and of release confessing all the agony he wanted to sweep away. He seized her hand, he pressed his mouth to it, then his face, not to let her see the reflection of what his years had been like. "If it's any kind of atonement, which it isn't . . . whatever I made you suffer, that's how I paid for it . . . by knowing what I was doing to you and having to do it . . . and waiting, waiting to . . . But it's over."

He raised his head, smiling, he looked down at her and she saw a look of protective tenderness come into his face, which told her of the despair he saw in hers.

"Dagny, don't think of that. I won't claim any suffering of mine as my excuse. Whatever my reason, I knew what I was doing and I've hurt you terribly I'll need years to make up for it. Forget what"—she knew that he meant: what his embrace had confessed—"what I haven't said. Of all the things I have to tell you, that is the one I'll say last." But his eyes, his smile, the grasp of his fingers on her wrist were saying it against his will. "You've borne too much, and there's a great deal that you have to learn to understand in order to lose every scar of the torture you never should have had to bear. All that matters now is that you're free to recover. We're free, both of us, we're free of the looters, we're out of their reach."

She said, her voice quietly desolate, "That's what I came here for—to try to understand. But I can't. It seems monstrously wrong to surrender the world to the looters, and monstrously wrong to live under their rule. I can neither give up nor go back. I can neither exist without work nor work as a serf. I had always thought that any sort of battle was proper, anything, except renunciation. I'm not sure we're right to quit, you and I, when we should have fought them. But there is no way to fight. It's surrender, if we leave—and surrender, if we remain. I don't know what is right any longer."

"Check your premises, Dagny. Contradictions don't exist."

"But I can't find any answer. I can't condemn you for what you're