

"You did? Well how did you like hearing your own lines come over the air, with me as your stooge?"

"You weren't, Mr. Rearden. They weren't my lines. Weren't they the things you had always lived by?"

"Yes."

"I only helped you to see that you should have been proud to live by them."

"I am glad you heard it."

"It was great, Mr. Rearden—and about three generations too late."

"What do you mean?"

"If one single businessman had had the courage, then, to say that he worked for nothing but his own profit—and to say it proudly—he would have saved the world."

"I haven't given up the world as lost."

"It isn't. It can never be. But oh God!--what he would have spared us!"

"Well, I guess we have to fight, no matter what era we're caught in."

"Yes . . . You know, Mr. Rearden, I would suggest that you get a transcript of your trial and read what you said. Then see whether you are practicing it fully and consistently—or not."

"You mean that I'm not?"

"See for yourself."

"I know that you had a great deal to tell me, when we were interrupted, that night at the mills. Why don't you finish what you had to say?"

"No. It's too soon."

Francisco acted as if there were nothing unusual about this visit, as if he took it as a matter of natural course—as he had always acted in Rearden's presence. But Rearden noted that he was not so calm as he wished to appear; he was pacing the room, in a manner that seemed a release for an emotion he did not want to confess; he had forgotten the lamp and it still stood on the floor as the room's sole illumination.

"You've been taking an awful beating in the way of discoveries, haven't you?" said Francisco. "How did you like the behavior of your fellow businessmen?"

"I suppose it was to be expected."

His voice tense with the anger of compassion, Francisco said, "It's been twelve years and yet I'm still unable to see it indifferently!" The sentence sounded involuntarily, as if, trying to suppress the sound of emotion, he had uttered suppressed words.

"Twelve years—since what?" asked Rearden.

There was an instant's pause, but Francisco answered calmly, "Since I understood what those men were doing." He added, "I know what you're going through right now . . . and what's still ahead."

"Thanks," said Rearden.

"For what?"

"For what you're trying so hard not to show. But don't worry

about me. I'm still able to stand it. . . . You know, I didn't come here because I wanted to talk about myself or even about the trial."

"I'll agree to any subject you choose—in order to have you here." He said it in the tone of a courteous joke; but the tone could not disguise it; he meant it. "What did you want to talk about?"

"You."

Francisco stopped. He looked at Rearden for a moment, then answered quietly, "All right."

If that which Rearden felt could have gone directly into words, past the barrier of his will, he would have cried: Don't let me down—I need you—I am fighting all of them, I have fought to my limit and am condemned to fight beyond it—and, as sole ammunition possible to me, I need the knowledge of one single man whom I can trust, respect and admire.

Instead, he said calmly, very simply—and the only note of a personal bond between them was that tone of sincerity which comes with a direct, unqualifiedly rational statement and implies the same honesty of mind in the listener—"You know, I think that the only real moral crime that one man can commit against another is the attempt to create, by his words or actions, an impression of the contradictory, the impossible, the irrational, and thus shake the concept of rationality in his victim."

"That's true."

"If I say that that is the dilemma you've put me in, would you help me by answering a personal question?"

"I will try."

"I don't have to tell you—I think you know it—that you are the man of the highest mind I have ever met. I am coming to accept, not as right, but at least as possible, the fact that you refuse to exercise your great ability in the world of today. But what a man does out of despair, is not necessarily a key to his character. I have always thought that the real key is in that which he seeks for his enjoyment. And this is what I find inconceivable: no matter what you've given up, so long as you chose to remain alive, how can you find any pleasure in spending a life as valuable as yours on running after cheap women and on an imbecile's idea of diversions?"

Francisco looked at him with a fine smile of amusement, as it saying: No? You didn't want to talk about yourself? And what is it that you're confessing but the desperate loneliness which makes the question of my character more important to you than any other question right now?

The smile merged into a soft, good-natured chuckle, as if the question involved no problem for him, no painful secret to reveal. "There's a way to solve every dilemma of that kind, Mr. Rearden. Check your premises." He sat down on the floor, settling himself gaily, informally, for a conversation he would enjoy. "Is it your own first-hand conclusion that I am a man of high mind?"

"Yes."

"Do you know of your own first-hand knowledge that I spend my life running after women?"

"You've never denied it."

"Denied it? I've gone to a lot of trouble to create that impression."

"Do you mean to say that it isn't true?"

"Do I strike you as a man with a miserable inferiority complex?"

"Good God, no!"

"Only that kind of man spends his life running after women."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember what I said about money and about the men who seek to reverse the law of cause and effect? The men who try to replace the mind by seizing the products of the mind? Well, the man who despises himself tries to gain self-esteem from sexual adventures—which can't be done, because sex is not the cause, but an effect and an expression of a man's sense of his own value."

"You'd better explain that."

"Did it ever occur to you that it's the same issue? The men who think that wealth comes from material resources and has no intellectual root or meaning, are the men who think—for the same reason—that sex is a physical capacity which functions independently of one's mind, choice or code of values. They think that your body creates a desire and makes a choice for you just about in some such way as iron ore transformed itself into railroad rails of its own volition. Love is blind, they say; sex is impervious to reason and mocks the power of all philosophers. But, in fact, a man's sexual choice is the result and the sum of his fundamental convictions. Tell me what a man finds sexually attractive and I will tell you his entire philosophy of life. Show me the woman he sleeps with and I will tell you his valuation of himself. No matter what corruption he's taught about the virtue of selflessness, sex is the most profoundly selfish of all acts, an act which he cannot perform for any motive but his own enjoyment—just try to think of performing it in a spirit of selfless charity!—an act which is not possible in self-abasement, only in self-evaluation, only in the confidence of being desired and being worthy of desire. It is an act that forces him to stand naked in spirit, as well as in body, and to accept his real ego as his standard of value. He will always be attracted to the woman who reflects his deepest vision of himself, the woman whose surrender permits him to experience—or to fake—a sense of self-esteem. The man who is proudly certain of his own value, will want the highest type of woman he can find, the woman he admires, the strongest, the hardest to conquer—because only the possession of a heroine will give him the sense of an achievement, not the possession of a brainless slut. He does not seek to . . . What's the matter?" he asked, seeing the look on Rearden's face, a look of intensity much beyond mere interest in an abstract discussion.

"Go on," said Rearden tensely.

"He does not seek to gain his value, he seeks to express it. There is no conflict between the standards of his mind and the desires of his body. But the man who is convinced of his own worthlessness will be drawn to a woman he despises—because she will reflect his own secret self, she will release him from that objective reality in which he is a fraud, she will give him a momentary illusion of his own value and a momentary escape from the moral code that damns