

own volition—which you cannot force—that makes you possible. I choose to be consistent and I will obey you in the manner you demand. Whatever you wish me to do, I will do it at the point of a gun. If you sentence me to jail, you will have to send armed men to carry me there—I will not volunteer to move. If you fine me, you will have to seize my property to collect the fine—I will not volunteer to pay it. If you believe that you have the right to force me—use your guns openly. I will not help you to disguise the nature of your action.”

The eldest judge leaned forward across the table and his voice became suavely derisive: “You speak as if you were fighting for some sort of principle, Mr. Rearden, but what you’re actually fighting for is only your property, isn’t it?”

“Yes, of course. I am fighting for my property. Do you know the kind of principle *that* represents?”

“You pose as a champion of freedom, but it’s only the freedom to make money that you’re after.”

“Yes, of course. All I want is the freedom to make money. Do you know what that freedom implies?”

“Surely, Mr. Rearden, you wouldn’t want your attitude to be misunderstood. You wouldn’t want to give support to the widespread impression that you are a man devoid of social conscience, who feels no concern for the welfare of his fellows and works for nothing but his own profit.”

“I work for nothing but my own profit. I earn it.”

There was a gasp, not of indignation, but of astonishment, in the crowd behind him and silence from the judges he faced. He went on calmly:

“No, I do not want my attitude to be misunderstood. I shall be glad to state it for the record. I am in full agreement with the facts of everything said about me in the newspapers—with the facts, but not with the evaluation. I work for nothing but my own profit—which I make by selling a product they need to men who are willing and able to buy it. I do not produce it for their benefit at the expense of mine, and they do not buy it for my benefit at the expense of theirs; I do not sacrifice my interests to them nor do they sacrifice theirs to me; we deal as equals by mutual consent to mutual advantage—and I am proud of every penny that I have earned in this manner. I am rich and I am proud of every penny I own. I made my money by my own effort, in free exchange and through the voluntary consent of every man I dealt with—the voluntary consent of those who employed me when I started, the voluntary consent of those who work for me now, the voluntary consent of those who buy my product. I shall answer all the questions you are afraid to ask me openly. Do I wish to pay my workers more than their services are worth to me? I do not. Do I wish to sell my product for less than my customers are willing to pay me? I do not. Do I wish to sell it at a loss or give it away? I do not. If this is evil, do whatever you please about me, according to whatever standards you hold. These are mine. I am earning my own living, as every honest man must. I refuse to accept as guilt the fact of my own existence and the fact that I must work in order to support it. I refuse to accept as guilt

the fact that I am able to do it and do it well. I refuse to accept as guilt the fact that I am able to do it better than most people—the fact that my work is of greater value than the work of my neighbors and that more men are willing to pay me. I refuse to apologize for my ability—I refuse to apologize for my success—I refuse to apologize for my money. If this is evil, make the most of it. If this is what the public finds harmful to its interests, let the public destroy me. This is my code—and I will accept no other. I could say to you that I have done more good for my fellow men than you can ever hope to accomplish—but I will not say it, because I do not seek the good of others as a sanction for my right to exist, nor do I recognize the good of others as a justification for their seizure of my property or their destruction of my life. I will not say that the good of others was the purpose of my work—my own good was my purpose, and I despise the man who surrenders his. I could say to you that you do not serve the public good—that nobody's good can be achieved at the price of human sacrifices—that when you violate the rights of one man, you have violated the rights of all, and a public of rightless creatures is doomed to destruction. I could say to you that you will and can achieve nothing but universal devastation—as any looter must, when he runs out of victims. I could say it, but I won't. It is not your particular policy that I challenge, but your moral premise. If it were true that men could achieve their good by means of turning some men into sacrificial animals, and I were asked to immolate myself for the sake of creatures who wanted to survive at the price of my blood, if I were asked to serve the interests of society apart from, above and against my own—I would refuse. I would reject it as the most contemptible evil, I would fight it with every power I possess, I would fight the whole of mankind, if one minute were all I could last before I were murdered, I would fight in the full confidence of the justice of my battle and of a living being's right to exist. Let there be no misunderstanding about me. If it is now the belief of my fellow men, who call themselves the public, that their mood requires victims, then I say. The public good be damned. I will have no part of it!"

The crowd burst into applause.

Rearden whirled around, more startled than his judges. He saw faces that laughed in violent excitement, and faces that pleaded for help; he saw their silent despair breaking out into the open; he saw the same anger and indignation as his own, finding release in the wild defiance of their cheering; he saw the looks of admiration and the looks of hope. There were also the faces of loose-mouthed young men and maliciously unkempt females, the kind who led the booing in newsreel theaters at any appearance of a businessman on the screen; they did not attempt a counter-demonstration; they were silent.

As he looked at the crowd, people saw in his face what the threats of the judges had not been able to evoke: the first sign of emotion.

It was a few moments before they heard the furious beating of a gavel upon the table and one of the judges yelling:

"—or I shall have the courtroom cleared!"