

within him "No I didn't expect it I heard them talking about it for over a year, but I didn't believe it Even when they were voting, I didn't believe it"

"What did you expect?"

"I thought They said all of us were to stand for the common good I thought what I had done down there in Colorado was good Good for everybody"

"Oh, you damn fool! Don't you see that that's what you're being punished for—because it was good?"

He shook his head "I don't understand it," he said "But I see no way out"

"Did you promise them to agree to destroy yourself?"

"There doesn't seem to be any choice for any of us"

"What do you mean?"

"Dagny the whole world's in a terrible state right now I don't know what's wrong with it, but something's very wrong Men have to get together and find a way out But who's to decide which way to take unless it's the majority? I guess that's the only fair method of deciding, I don't see any other I suppose somebody's got to be sacrificed If it turned out to be me I have no right to complain The right's on their side Men have to get together"

She made an effort to speak calmly, she was trembling with anger "If that's the price of getting together then I'll be damned if I want to live on the same earth with any human beings! If the rest of them can survive only by destroying us, then why should we wish them to survive? Nothing can make self immolation proper Nothing can give them the right to turn men into sacrificial animals Nothing can make it moral to destroy the best One can't be punished for being good One can't be penalized for ability If that is right, then we'd better start slaughtering one another, because there isn't any right at all in the world!"

He did not answer He looked at her helplessly

"If it's that kind of world how can we live in it?" she asked

"I don't know" he whispered

"Dan, do you really think it's right? In all truth, deep down, do you think it's right?"

He closed his eyes "No," he said Then he looked at her and she saw a look of torture for the first time "That's what I've been sitting here trying to understand I know that I ought to think it's right—but I can't It's as if my tongue wouldn't turn to say it I keep seeing every tie of the track down there, every signal light, every bridge, every night that I spent when—" His head dropped down on his arms "Oh God, it's so damn unjust!"

"Dan," she said through her teeth, "fight it"

He raised his head His eyes were empty "No," he said "It would be wrong I'm just selfish"

"Oh, damn that rotten trip! You know better than that!"

"I don't know" His voice was very tired. "I've been sitting here, trying to think about it I don't know what is right any more" He added, "I don't think I care"

She knew suddenly that all further words were useless and that

Dan Conway would never be a man of action again. She did not know what made her certain of it. She said, wondering, "You've never given up in the face of a battle before."

"No, I guess I haven't. . . ." He spoke with a quiet, indifferent astonishment. "I've fought storms and floods and rock slides and rail fissure. . . . I knew how to do it, and I liked doing it. . . . But this kind of battle—it's one I can't fight."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Who knows why the world is what it is? Oh, who is John Galt?"

She winced. "Then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"I mean—" She stopped.

He knew what she meant. "Oh, there's always something to do. . . ." He spoke without conviction. "I guess it's only Colorado and New Mexico that they're going to declare restricted. I'll still have the line in Arizona to run." He added, "As it was twenty years ago . . . Well, it will keep me busy. I'm getting tired. Dagny. I didn't take time to notice it, but I guess I am."

She could say nothing.

"I'm not going to build a line through one of their blighted areas," he said in the same indifferent voice. "That's what they tried to hand me for a consolation prize, but I think it's just talk. You can't build a railroad where there's nothing for hundreds of miles but a couple of farmers who're not growing enough to feed themselves. You can't build a road and make it pay. If you don't make it pay, who's going to? It doesn't make sense to me. They just didn't know what they were saying."

"Oh, to hell with their blighted areas! It's you I'm thinking about." She had to name it. "What will you do with yourself?"

"I don't know. . . . Well, there's a lot of things I haven't had time to do. Fishing, for instance. I've always liked fishing. Maybe I'll start reading books, always meant to. Guess I'll take it easy now. Guess I'll go fishing. There's some nice places down in Arizona, where it's peaceful and quiet and you don't have to see a human being for miles. . . ." He glanced up at her and added, "Forget it. Why should you worry about me?"

"It's not about you, it's . . . Dan," she said suddenly, "I hope you know it's not for your sake that I wanted to help you fight."

He smiled; it was a faint, friendly smile. "I know," he said.

"It's not out of pity or charity or any ugly reason like that. Look. I intended to give you the battle of your life, down there in Colorado. I intended to cut into your business and squeeze you to the wall and drive you out, if necessary."

He chuckled faintly; it was appreciation. "You would have made a pretty good try at it, too," he said.

"Only I didn't think it would be necessary. I thought there was enough room there for both of us."

"Yes," he said. "There was."

"Still, if I found that there wasn't, I would have fought you, and if I could make my road better than yours, I'd have broken you and

not given a damn about what happened to you But this Dan, I don't think I want to look at our Rio Norte Line now I Oh God, Dan, I don't want to be a looter!"

He looked at her silently for a moment It was an odd look, as if from a great distance He said softly, "You should have been born about a hundred years earlier kid Then you would have had a chance "

'To hell with that I intend to make my own chance "

'That's what I intended at your age '

You succeeded "

Have I?

She sat still suddenly unable to move

He sat up straight and said sharply almost as if he were issuing orders You'd better look at that Rio Norte Line of yours, and you'd better do it fast Get it ready before I move out, because if you don't that will be the end of Ellis Wyatt and all the rest of them down there, and they're the best people left in the country You can't let that happen It's all on your shoulders now It would be no use trying to explain to your brother that it's going to be much tougher for you down there without me to compete with But you and I know it So go to it Whatever you do you won't be a looter No looter could run a railroad in that part of the country and last at it Whatever you make down there you will have earned it Lice like your brother don't count anyway It's up to you now "

She sat looking at him wondering what it was that had defeated a man of this kind she knew that it was not James Taggart

She saw him looking at her as if he were struggling with a question mark of his own Then he smiled and she saw incredulously, that the smile held sadness and pity

You'd better not feel sorry for me " he said 'I think, of the two of us, it's you who have the harder time ahead And I think you're going to get it worse than I did '

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She had telephoned the mills and made an appointment to see Hank Rearden that afternoon She had just hung up the receiver and was bending over the maps of the Rio Norte Line spread on her desk, when the door opened Dagny looked up, startled, she did not expect the door of her office to open without announcement

The man who entered was a stranger He was young, tall, and something about him suggested violence, though she could not say what it was, because the first trait one grasped about him was a quality of self-control that seemed almost arrogant He had dark eyes, disheveled hair and his clothes were expensive, but worn as if he did not care or notice what he wore

'Ellis Wyatt,' he said in self-introduction

She leaped to her feet, involuntarily She understood why nobody had or could have stopped him in the counter office

"Sit down, Mr Wyatt," she said, smiling

"It won't be necessary " He did not smile "I don't hold long conferences "