

This—thought Dagny, with a sickened amusement—was tale of the sincerity of the dishonest. The most fraudulent part of the fraud was that they meant it. They were offering Galt the best that their view of existence could offer, they were trying to tempt him with that which was their dream of life's highest fulfillment: this spread of mindless adulation, the unreality of this enormous pretense—approval without standards, tribute without content, honor without causes, admiration without reasons, love without a code of values.

"We have discarded all our petty differences," Wesley Mouch was now saying into the microphone, "all partisan opinions, all personal interests and selfish views—in order to serve under the selfless leadership of John Galt!"

Why are they listening?—thought Dagny. Don't they see the hallmark of death in those faces, and the hallmark of life in his? Which state do they wish to choose? Which state do they seek for mankind? . . . She looked at the faces in the ballroom. They were nervously blank; they showed nothing but the sagging weight of lethargy and the staleness of a chronic fear. They were looking at Galt and at Mouch, as if unable to perceive any difference between them or to feel concern if a difference existed, their empty, uncritical, unvaluing stare declaring: "Who am I to know?" She shuddered, remembering his sentence: "The man who declares, 'Who am I to know?' is declaring, 'Who am I to live?'" Did they care to live?—she thought. They did not seem to care even for the effort of raising that question. . . . She saw a few faces who seemed to care. They were looking at Galt with a desperate plea, with a wistfully tragic admiration—and with hands lying limply on the tables before them. These were the men who saw what he was, who lived in frustrated longing for his world—but tomorrow, if they saw him being murdered before them, their hands would hang as limply and their eyes would look away, saying, "Who am I to act?"

"Unity of action and purpose," said Mouch, "will bring us to a happier world. . . ."

Mr. Thompson leaned toward Galt and whispered with an amiable smile, "You'll have to say a few words to the country, later on, after me. No, no, not a long speech, just a sentence or two, no more. Just 'hello, folks' or something like that, so they'll recognize your voice." The faintly stressed pressure of the "secretary's" muzzle against Galt's side added a silent paragraph. Galt did not answer.

"The John Galt Plan," Wesley Mouch was saying, "will reconcile all conflicts. It will protect the property of the rich and give a greater share to the poor. It will cut down the burden of your taxes and provide you with more government benefits. It will lower prices and raise wages. It will give more freedom to the individual and strengthen the bonds of collective obligations. It will combine the efficiency of free enterprise with the generosity of a planned economy."

Dagny observed some faces—it took her an effort fully to believe it—who were looking at Galt with hatred. Jim was one of them, she noted. When the image of Mouch held the screen, these faces were

relaxed in bored contentment, which was not pleasure, but the comfort of license, of knowing that nothing was demanded of them and nothing was firm or certain. When the camera flashed the image of Galt, their lips grew tight and their features were sharpened by a look of peculiar caution. She felt with sudden certainty that they feared the precision of his face, the unyielding clarity of his features, the look of being an entity, a look of asserting existence. They hate him for being himself—she thought, feeling a touch of cold horror, as the nature of their souls became real to her—they hate him for his capacity to live. Do *they* want to live?—she thought in self-mockery. Through the stunned numbness of her mind, she remembered the sound of his sentence: "The desire not to be anything, is the desire not to be."

It was now Mr. Thompson who was yelling into the microphone in his briskest and folksiest manner: "And I say to you: kick them in the teeth, all those doubters who're spreading disunity and fear! They told you that John Galt would never join us, didn't they? Well, here he is, in person, of his own free choice, at this table and at the head of our State! Ready, willing and able to serve the people's cause! Don't you ever again, any of you, start doubting or running or giving up! Tomorrow is here today—and what a tomorrow! With three meals a day for everyone on earth, with a car in every garage, and with electric power given *free*, produced by some sort of a motor the like of which we've never seen! And all you have to do is just be patient a little while longer! Patience, faith and unity—that's the recipe for progress! We must stand united among ourselves and united with the rest of the world, as a great big happy family, all working for the good of all! We have found a leader who will beat the record of our richest and busiest past! It's his love for mankind that has made him come here—to serve you, protect you and take care of you! He has heard your pleas and has answered the call of our common human duty! Every man is his brother's keeper! No man is an island unto himself! And now you will hear his voice—now you will hear his own message! . . . Ladies and gentlemen," he said solemnly, "John Galt—to the collective family of mankind!"

The camera moved to Galt. He remained still for a moment. Then, with so swift and expert a movement that his secretary's hand was unable to match it, he rose to his feet, leaning sidewise, leaving the pointed gun momentarily exposed to the sight of the world—then, standing straight, facing the cameras, looking at all his invisible viewers, he said:

"Get the hell out of my way!"

Chapter IX THE GENERATOR

"Get the hell out of my way!"

Dr. Robert Stadler heard it on the radio in his car. He did not know whether the next sound, part-gasp, part-scream, part-laughter, started rising from him or from the radio—but he heard the click that cut them both off. The radio went dead. No further sounds came from the Wayne-Falkland Hotel.