

pronouncing no verdict, expressing no opinion, never encroaching on her emotions by any sign of concern for them, speaking with the shining austerity and the awesome power of facts. He told her who ran Taggart Transcontinental. He told her the story of the John Galt Line. She listened, and what she felt was not shock, but worse: the lack of shock, as if she had always known it. "Thank you, Mr. Willers," was all that she said when he finished.

She waited for Jim to come home, that evening, and the thing that eroded any pain or indignation, was a feeling of her own detachment, as if it did not matter to her any longer, as if some action were required of her, but it made no difference what the action would be or the consequences.

It was not anger that she felt when she saw Jim enter the room, but a murky astonishment, almost as if she wondered who he was and why it should now be necessary to speak to him. She told him what she knew, briefly, in a tired, extinguished voice. It seemed to her that he understood it from her first few sentences, as if he had expected this to come sooner or later.

"Why didn't you tell me the truth?" she asked.

"So that's your idea of gratitude?" he screamed. "So that's how you feel after everything I've done for you? Everybody told me that crudeness and selfishness was all I could expect for lifting a cheap little alley cat by the scruff of her neck!"

She looked at him as if he were making inarticulate sounds that connected to nothing inside her mind. "Why didn't you tell me the truth?"

"Is that all the love you felt for me, you sneaky little hypocrite? Is that all I get in return for my faith in you?"

"Why did you lie? Why did you let me think what I thought?"

"You should be ashamed of yourself, you should be ashamed to face me or speak to me!"

"I?" The inarticulate sounds had connected, but she could not believe the sum they made. "What are you trying to do, Jim?" she asked, her voice incredulous and distant.

"Have you thought of my feelings? Have you thought of what this would do to my feelings? You should have considered my feelings first! That's the first obligation of any wife—and of a woman in your position in particular! There's nothing lower and uglier than ingratitude!"

For the flash of one instant, she grasped the unthinkable fact of a man who was guilty and knew it and was trying to escape by inducing an emotion of guilt in his victim. But she could not hold the fact inside her brain. She felt a stab of horror, the convulsion of a mind rejecting a sight that would destroy it—a stab like a swift recoil from the edge of insanity. By the time she dropped her head, closing her eyes, she knew only that she felt disgust, a sickening disgust for a nameless reason.

When she raised her head, it seemed to her that she caught a glimpse of him watching her with the uncertain, retreating, calculating look of a man whose trick had not worked. But before she had

time to believe it, his face was hidden again under an expression of injury and anger.

She said, as if she were naming her thoughts for the benefit of the rational being who was not present, but whose presence she had to assume, since no other could be addressed, "That night . . . those headlines . . . that glory . . . it was not you at all . . . it was Dagny."

"Shut up, you rotten little bitch!"

She looked at him blankly, without reaction. She looked as if nothing could reach her, because her dying words had been uttered.

He made the sound of a sob. "Cherryl, I'm sorry, I didn't mean it, I take it back, I didn't mean it . . ."

She remained standing, leaning against the wall, as she had stood from the first.

He dropped down on the edge of a couch, in a posture of helpless dejection. "How could I have explained it to you?" he said in the tone of abandoning hope. "It's all so big and so complex. How could I have told you anything about a transcontinental railroad, unless you knew all the details and ramifications? How could I have explained to you my years of work, my . . . Oh, what's the use? I've always been misunderstood and I should have been accustomed to it by now, only I thought that you were different and that I had a chance."

"Jim, why did you marry me?"

He chuckled sadly. "That's what everybody kept asking me. I didn't think *you'd* ever ask it. Why? Because I love you."

She wondered at how strange it was that this word—which was supposed to be the simplest in the human language, the word understood by all, the universal bond among men—conveyed to her no meaning whatever. She did not know what it was that it named in his mind.

"Nobody's ever loved me," he said. "There isn't any love in the world. People don't feel. I *feel* things. Who cares about that? All they care for is time schedules and freight loads and money. I can't live among those people. I'm very lonely. I've always longed to find understanding. Maybe I'm just a hopeless idealist, looking for the impossible. Nobody will ever understand me."

"Jim," she said, with an odd little note of severity in her voice, "what I've struggled for all this time is to understand you."

He dropped his hand in a motion of brushing her words aside, not offensively, but sadly. "I thought you could. You're all I have. But maybe understanding is just not possible between human beings."

"Why should it be impossible? Why don't you tell me what it is that you want? Why don't you help me to understand you?"

He sighed. "That's it. That's the trouble—your asking all those whys. Your constant asking of a why for everything. What I'm talking about can't be put into words. It can't be named. It has to be felt. Either you feel it or you don't. It's not a thing of the mind, but of the heart. Don't you ever feel? Just *feel*, without asking all those questions? Can't you understand me as a human being, not as if I were a scientific object in a laboratory? The greater understanding that transcends our shabby words and helpless minds . . . No, I guess