

that his body had no strength left to move--yet that he felt as if he were entering his office in the morning, eager for ten new problems to solve. He looked at Francisco and noticed for the first time that their clothes had black-ringed holes, that their hands were bleeding, that there was a patch of skin torn on Francisco's temple and a red thread winding down his cheekbone. Francisco pushed the goggles back off his eyes and grinned at him: it was a smile of morning.

A young man with a look of chronic hurt and impertinence together, rushed up to him, crying, "I couldn't help it, Mr. Rearden!" and launched into a speech of explanation. Rearden turned his back on him without a word. It was the assistant in charge of the pressure gauge of the furnace, a young man out of college.

Somewhere on the outer edge of Rearden's consciousness, there was the thought that accidents of this nature were happening more frequently now, caused by the kind of ore he was using, but he had to use whatever ore he could find. There was the thought that his old workers had always been able to avert disaster; any of them would have seen the indications of a hang-up and known how to prevent it; but there were not many of them left, and he had to employ whatever men he could find. Through the swirling coils of steam around him, he observed that it was the older men who had rushed from all over the mills to fight the breakout and now stood in line, being given first aid by the medical staff. He wondered what was happening to the young men of the country. But the wonder was swallowed by the sight of the college boy's face, which he could not bear to see, by a wave of contempt, by the wordless thought that if *this* was the enemy, there was nothing to fear. All these things came to him and vanished in the outer darkness; the sight blotting them out was Francisco d'Anconia.

He saw Francisco giving orders to the men around him. They did not know who he was or where he came from, but they listened: they knew he was a man who knew his job. Francisco broke off in the middle of a sentence, seeing Rearden approach and listen, and said, laughing, "Oh, I beg your pardon!" Rearden said, "Go right ahead. It's all correct, so far."

They said nothing to each other when they walked together through the darkness, on their way back to the office. Rearden felt an exultant laughter swelling within him, he felt that he wanted, in his turn, to wink at Francisco like a fellow conspirator who had learned a secret Francisco would not acknowledge. He glanced at his face once in a while, but Francisco would not look at him.

After a while, Francisco said, "You saved my life." The "thank you" was in the way he said it.

Rearden chuckled. "You saved my furnace."

They went on in silence Rearden felt himself growing lighter with every step. Raising his face to the cold air, he saw the peaceful darkness of the sky and a single star above a smokestack with the vertical lettering: REARDEN STEEL. He felt how glad he was to be alive.

He did not expect the change he saw in Francisco's face when he looked at it in the light of his office. The things he had seen by the glare of the furnace were gone. He had expected a look of triumph,

of mockery at all the insults Francisco had heard from him, a look demanding the apology he was joyously eager to offer. Instead, he saw a face made lifeless by an odd dejection.

"Are you hurt?"

"No . . . no, not at all."

"Come here," ordered Rearden, opening the door of his bathroom.

"Look at yourself."

"Never mind. You come here."

For the first time, Rearden felt that he was the older man; he felt the pleasure of taking Francisco in charge; he felt a confident, amused, paternal protectiveness. He washed the grime off Francisco's face, he put disinfectants and adhesive bandages on his temple, his hands, his scorched elbows. Francisco obeyed him in silence.

Rearden asked, in the tone of the most eloquent salute he could offer, "Where did you learn to work like that?"

Francisco shrugged. "I was brought up around smelters of every kind," he answered indifferently.

Rearden could not decipher the expression of his face: it was only a look of peculiar stillness, as if his eyes were fixed on some secret vision of his own that drew his mouth into a line of desolate, bitter, hurting self-mockery.

They did not speak until they were back in the office.

"You know," said Rearden, "everything you said here was true. But that was only part of the story. The other part is what we've done tonight. Don't you see? We're able to act. They're not. So it's we who'll win in the long run, no matter what they do to us."

Francisco did not answer.

"Listen," said Rearden, "I know what's been the trouble with you. You've never cared to do a real day's work in your life. I thought you were conceited enough, but I see that you have no idea of what you've got in you. Forget that fortune of yours for a while and come to work for me. I'll start you as furnace foreman any time. You don't know what it will do for you. In a few years, you'll be ready to appreciate and to run d'Anconia Copper."

He expected a burst of laughter and he was prepared to argue; instead, he saw Francisco shaking his head slowly, as if he could not trust his voice, as if he feared that were he to speak, he would accept. In a moment, he said, "Mr. Rearden . . . I think I would give the rest of my life for one year as your furnace foreman. But I can't."

"Why not?"

"Don't ask me. It's . . . a personal matter."

The vision of Francisco in Rearden's mind, which he had resented and found irresistibly attractive, had been the figure of a man radiantly incapable of suffering. What he saw now in Francisco's eyes was the look of a quiet, tightly controlled, patiently borne torture.

Francisco reached silently for his overcoat.

"You're not leaving, are you?" asked Rearden.

"Yes."

"Aren't you going to finish what you had to tell me?"

"Not tonight."