

anything is permitted to him, even plunder and murder, all a man has to do is to be in need. Do you wonder why the world is collapsing around us? That is what I am fighting Mr. Rearden. Until men learn that of all human symbols, Robin Hood is the most immoral and the most contemptible, there will be no justice on earth and no way for mankind to survive."

Rearden listened, feeling numb. But under the numbness, like the first thrust of a seed breaking through, he felt an emotion he could not identify except that it seemed familiar and very distant, like something experienced and renounced long ago.

"What I actually am, Mr. Rearden, is a policeman. It is a policeman's duty to protect men from criminals—criminals being those who seize wealth by force. It is a policeman's duty to retrieve stolen property and return it to its owners. But when robbery becomes the purpose of the law, and the policeman's duty becomes, not the protection, but the plunder of property—then it is an outlaw who has to become a policeman. I have been selling the cargoes I retrieved to some special customers of mine in this country, who pay me in gold. Also, I have been selling my cargoes to the smugglers and the black-market traders of the People's States of Europe. Do you know the conditions of existence in those People's States? Since production and trade—not violence—were decreed to be crimes, the best men of Europe had no choice but to become criminals. The slave-drivers of those States are kept in power by the handouts from their fellow looters in countries not yet fully drained, such as this country. I do not let the handouts reach them. I sell the goods to Europe's law-breakers; at the highest prices I can get, and I make them pay me in gold. Gold is the objective value, the means of preserving one's wealth and one's future. Nobody is permitted to have gold in Europe, except the whip-wielding friends of humanity, who claim that they spend it for the welfare of their victims. That is the gold which my smuggler-customers obtain to pay me. How? By the same method I use to obtain the goods. And then I return the gold to those from whom the goods were stolen—to you, Mr. Rearden, and to other men like you."

Rearden grasped the nature of the emotion he had forgotten. It was the emotion he had felt when, at the age of fourteen, he had looked at his first pay check—when, at the age of twenty-four, he had been made superintendent of the ore mines—when, as the owner of the mines, he had placed, in his own name, his first order for new equipment from the best concern of the time, Twentieth Century Motors—an emotion of solemn, joyous excitement, the sense of winning his place in a world he respected and earning the recognition of men he admired. For almost two decades, that emotion had been buried under a mountain of wreckage, as the years had added layer upon gray layer of contempt, of indignation, of his struggle not to look around him, not to see those he dealt with, not to expect anything from men and to keep, as a private vision within the four walls of his office, the sense of that world into which he had hoped to rise. Yet there it was again, breaking through from under the wreckage, that feeling of quickened interest, of listening to the luminous

and knew that the austerity of the marble face was the form of a disciplined capacity to feel too deeply. The even voice was continuing dispassionately:

"I wanted you to know this. I wanted you to know it now, when it must seem to you that you're abandoned at the bottom of a pit among subhuman creatures who are all that's left of mankind. I wanted you to know, in your most hopeless hour, that the day of deliverance is much closer than you think. And there was one special reason why I had to speak to you and tell you my secret ahead of the proper time. Have you heard of what happened to Orren Boyle's steel mills on the coast of Maine?"

"Yes," said Rearden—and was shocked to hear that the word came as a gasp out of the sudden jolt of eagerness within him. "I didn't know whether it was true."

"It's true. I did it. Mr. Boyle is not going to manufacture Rearden Metal on the coast of Maine. He is not going to manufacture it anywhere. Neither is any other looting louse who thinks that a directive can give him a right to your brain. Whoever attempts to produce that Metal, will find his furnaces blown up, his machinery blasted, his shipments wrecked, his plant set on fire—so many things will happen to any man who tries it, that people will say there's a curse on it, and there will soon be no worker in the country willing to enter the plant of any new producer of Rearden Metal. If men like Boyle think that force is all they need to rob their betters—let them see what happens when one of their betters chooses to resort to force. I wanted you to know, Mr. Rearden, that none of them will produce your Metal nor make a penny on it."

Because he felt an exultant desire to laugh—as he had laughed at the news of Wyatt's fire, as he had laughed at the crash of d'Anconia Copper—and knew that if he did, the thing he feared would hold him, would not release him this time, and he would never see his mills again—Rearden drew back and, for a moment, kept his lips closed tight to utter no sound. When the moment was over, he said quietly, his voice firm and dead, "Take that gold of yours and get away from here. I won't accept the help of a criminal."

Danneskjöld's face showed no reaction. "I cannot force you to accept the gold, Mr. Rearden. But I will not take it back. You may leave it lying where it is, if you wish."

"I don't want your help and I don't intend to protect you. If I were within reach of a phone, I would call the police. I would and I will, if you ever attempt to approach me again. I'll do it—in self-protection."

"I understand exactly what you mean."

"You know—because I've listened to you, because you've seen me eager to hear it that I haven't damned you as I should. I can't damn you or anyone else. There are no standards left for men to live by, so I don't care to judge anything they do today or in what manner they attempt to endure the unendurable. If this is your manner, I will let you go to hell in your own way, but I want no part of it. Neither as your inspiration nor as your accomplice. Don't expect me ever to accept your bank account, if it does exist. Spend it on

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