

She heard Galt asking, his tone severe with concern, "What is it?"

"I'll tell you afterwards."

"Why are you so late?"

"I have to leave again in an hour."

"To *leave*?"

"John, I just came to tell you that I won't be able to stay here this year."

There was a pause, then Galt asked gravely, his voice low, "Is it as bad as that—whatever it is?"

"Yes. I . . . I might be back before the month is over. I don't know." He added, with the sound of a desperate effort, "I don't know whether to hope to be done with it quickly or . . . or not."

"Francisco, could you stand a shock right now?"

"I? Nothing could shock me now."

"There's a person, here, in my guest room, whom you have to see. It will be a shock to you, so I think I'd better warn you in advance that this person is still a scab."

"What? A scab? In *your* house?"

"Let me tell you how—"

"That's something I want to see for myself!"

She heard Francisco's contemptuous chuckle and the rush of his steps, she saw her door flung open, and she noticed dimly that it was Galt who closed it, leaving them alone.

She did not know how long Francisco stood looking at her, because the first moment that she grasped fully was when she saw him on his knees, holding onto her, his face pressed to her legs, the moment when she felt as if the shudder that ran through his body and left him still, had run into hers and made her able to move.

She saw, in astonishment, that her hand was moving gently over his hair, while she was thinking that she had no right to do it and feeling as if a current of serenity were flowing from her hand, enveloping them both, smoothing the past. He did not move, he made no sound, as if the act of holding her said everything he had to say.

When he raised his head, he looked as she had felt when she had opened her eyes in the valley: he looked as if no pain had ever existed in the world. He was laughing.

"Dagny, Dagny, Dagny"—his voice sounded, not as if a confession resisted for years were breaking out, but as if he were repeating the long since known, laughing at the pretense that it had ever been unsaid—"of course I love you. Were you afraid when he made me say it? I'll say it as often as you wish—I love you, darling, I love you, I always will—don't be afraid for me, I don't care if I'll never have you again, what does that matter?—you're alive and you're here and you know everything now. And it's so simple, isn't it? Do you see what it was and why I had to desert you?" His arm swept out to point at the valley. "There it is—it's *your* earth, *your* kingdom, *your* kind of world—Dagny, I've always loved you and that I deserted you, *that* was my love."

He took her hands and pressed them to his lips and held them, not moving, not as a kiss, but as a long moment of rest, as if the effort of speech were a distraction from the fact of her presence,

and as if he were torn by too many things to say, by the pressure of all the words stored in the silence of years.

"The women I chased—you didn't believe that, did you? I've never touched one of them—but I think you knew it, I think you've known it all along. The playboy—it was a part that I had to play in order not to let the looters suspect me while I was destroying d'Anconia Copper in plain sight of the whole world. That's the joker in their system, they're out to fight any man of honor and ambition, but let them see a worthless rotter and they think he's a friend, they think he's safe—*safe!*—that's their view of life, but are they learning!—are they learning whether evil is safe and incompetence practical! . . . Dagny, it was the night when I knew, for the first time, that I loved you—it was then that I knew I had to go. It was when you entered my hotel room, that night, when I saw what you looked like, what you were, what you meant to me—and what awaited you in the future. Had you been less, you might have stopped me for a while. But it was you, *you* who were the final argument that made me leave you. I asked for your help, that night—against John Galt. But I knew that you were his best weapon against me, though neither you nor he could know it. You were everything that he was seeking, everything he told us to live for or die, if necessary. . . . I was ready for him, when he called me suddenly to come to New York, that spring. I had not heard from him for some time. He was fighting the same problem I was. He solved it. . . . Do you remember? It was the time when you did not hear from me for three years. Dagny, when I took over my father's business, when I began to deal with the whole industrial system of the world, it was then that I began to see the nature of the evil I had suspected, but thought too monstrous to believe. I saw the tax-collecting vermin that had grown for centuries like mildew on d'Anconia Copper, draining us by no right that anyone could name—I saw the government regulations passed to cripple me, because I was successful, and to help my competitors, because they were loafing failures—I saw the labor unions who won every claim against me, by reason of my ability to make their livelihood possible—I saw that any man's desire for money he could not earn was regarded as a righteous wish, but if he earned it, it was damned as greed—I saw the politicians who winked at me, telling me not to worry, because I could just work a little harder and outsmart them all. I looked past the profits of the moment, and I saw that the harder I worked, the more I tightened the noose around my throat, I saw that my energy was being poured down a sewer, that the parasites who fed on me were being fed upon in their turn, that they were caught in their own trap—and that there was no reason for it, no answer known to anyone, that the sewer pipes of the world, draining its productive blood, led into some dank fog nobody had dared to pierce, while people merely shrugged and said that life on earth could be nothing but evil. And then I saw that the whole industrial establishment of the world, with all of its magnificent machinery, its thousand-ton furnaces, its transatlantic cables, its mahogany offices, its stock exchanges, its blazing electric signs, its power, its wealth—all of it was run, not by bankers and boards of