

the same reason as a banker may not accept and pass counterfeit money, granting it the sanction, honor and prestige of his bank, just as he may not grant the counterfeiter's demand for tolerance of a mere difference of opinion—so I may not grant the title of philosopher to Dr. Simon Pritchett or compete with him for the minds of men. Dr. Pritchett has nothing to deposit to the account of philosophy, except his declared intention to destroy it. He seeks to cash in—by means of denying it—on the power of reason among men. He seeks to stamp the mint-mark of reason upon the plans of his looting masters. He seeks to use the prestige of philosophy to purchase the enslavement of thought. But that prestige is an account which can exist only so long as I am there to sign the checks. Let him do it without me. Let him—and those who entrust to him their children's minds—have exactly that which they demand: a world of intellectuals without intellect and of thinkers who proclaim that they cannot think. I am conceding it. I am complying. And when they see the absolute reality of their non-absolute world, I will not be there and it will not be I who will pay the price of their contradictions."

"Dr. Akston quit on the principle of sound banking," said Midas Mulligan. "I quit on the principle of love. Love is the ultimate form of recognition one grants to superlative values. It was the Hunsacker case that made me quit—that case when a court of law ordered that I honor, as first right to my depositors' funds, the demand of those who would offer proof that they had no right to demand it. I was ordered to hand out money earned by men, to a worthless rotter whose only claim consisted of his inability to earn it. I was born on a farm. I knew the meaning of money. I had dealt with many men in my life. I had watched them grow. I had made my fortune by being able to spot a certain kind of man. The kind who never asked you for faith, hope and charity, but offered you facts, proof and profit. Did you know that I invested in Hank Rearden's business at the time when he was rising, when he had just beaten his way out of Minnesota to buy the steel mills in Pennsylvania? Well, when I looked at that court order on my desk, I had a vision. I saw a picture, and I saw it so clearly that it changed the looks of everything for me. I saw the bright face and the eyes of young Rearden, as he'd been when I'd met him first. I saw him lying at the foot of an altar, with his blood running down into the earth—and what stood on that altar was Lee Hunsacker, with the mucus-filled eyes, whining that he'd never had a chance. . . . It's strange how simple things become, once you see them clearly. It wasn't hard for me to close the bank and go: I kept seeing, for the first time in my life, what it was that I had lived for and loved."

She looked at Judge Narragansett. "You quit over the same case, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Judge Narragansett. "I quit when the court of appeals reversed my ruling. The purpose for which I had chosen my work, was my resolve to be a guardian of justice. But the laws they asked me to enforce made me the executor of the vilest injustice conceivable. I was asked to use force to violate the rights of disarmed men, who came before me to seek my protection for their rights. Litigants

obey the verdict of a tribunal solely on the premise that there is an *objective* rule of conduct, which they both accept. Now I saw that one man was to be bound by it, but the other was not, one was to obey a rule, the other was to assert an arbitrary wish—his *need*—and the law was to stand on the side of the wish. Justice was to consist of upholding the unjustifiable. I quit—because I could not have borne to hear the words ‘Your Honor’ addressed to me by an honest man.”

Her eyes moved slowly to Richard Halley, as if she were both pleading and afraid to hear his story. He smiled.

“I would have forgiven men for my struggle,” said Richard Halley. “It was their view of my success that I could not forgive. I had felt no hatred in all the years when they rejected me. If my work was new, I had to give them time to learn, if I took pride in being first to break a trail to a height of my own, I had no right to complain if others were slow to follow. That was what I had told myself through all those years—except on some nights, when I could neither wait nor believe any longer, when I cried ‘why?’ but found no answer. Then, on the night when they chose to cheer me, I stood before them on the stage of a theater, thinking that this was the moment I had struggled to reach, wishing to feel it, but feeling nothing. I was seeing all the other nights behind me, hearing the ‘why?’ which still had no answer—and their cheers seemed as empty as their snubs. If they had said, ‘Sorry to be so late, thank you for waiting’—I would have asked for nothing else and they could have had anything I had to give them. But what I saw in their faces, and in the way they spoke when they crowded to praise me, was the thing I had heard being preached to artists—only I had never believed that anyone human could mean it. They seemed to say that they owed me nothing, that their deafness had provided me with a moral goal, that it had been my duty to struggle, to suffer, to bear—for their sake—whatever sneers, contempt, injustice, torture *they* chose to inflict upon me, to bear it in order to teach them to enjoy my work, that this was their rightful due and my proper purpose. And then I understood the nature of the looter-in-spirit, a thing I had never been able to conceive. I saw them reaching into my soul, just as they reached into Mulligan’s pocket, reaching to expropriate the value of my person, just as they reach to expropriate his wealth—I saw the impudent malice of mediocrity boastfully holding up its own emptiness as an abyss to be filled by the bodies of its betters—I saw them seeking, just as they seek to feed on Mulligan’s money, to feed on those hours when I wrote my music and on that which made me write it, seeking to gnaw their way to self-esteem by extorting from me the admission that *they* were the goal of my music, so that precisely by reason of my achievement, it would not be *they* who’d acknowledge my value, but I who would bow to theirs. . . . It was that night that I took the oath never to let them hear another note of mine. The streets were empty when I left that theater. I was the last one to leave—and I saw a man whom I had never seen before, waiting for me in the light of a lamppost. He did not have to tell