

She felt his hand on her head, on her shoulder, she felt the protection of his firmness, a firmness which seemed to tell her that as her tears were for both of them, so was his knowledge, that he knew her pain and felt it and understood, yet was able to witness it calmly—and his calm seemed to lift her burden, by granting her the right to break, here, at his feet, by telling her that he was able to carry what she could not carry any longer. She knew dimly that *this* was the real Hank Rearden, and no matter what form of insulting cruelty he had once given to their first nights together, no matter how often she had seemed as the stronger of the two, this had always been within him and at the root of their bond—this strength of his which would protect her if ever hers were gone.

When she raised her head, he was smiling down at her.

"Hank . . ." she whispered guiltily, in desperate astonishment at her own break.

"Quiet, darling."

She let her face drop back on his knees; she lay still, fighting for rest, fighting against the pressure of a wordless thought: he had been able to bear and to accept her broadcast only as a confession of her love; it made the truth she now had to tell him more inhuman a blow than anyone had the right to deliver. She felt terror at the thought that she would not have the strength to do it, and terror at the thought that she would.

When she looked up at him again, he ran his hand over her forehead, brushing the hair off her face.

"It's over, darling," he said. "The worst of it is over, for both of us."

"No, Hank, it isn't."

He smiled.

He drew her to sit beside him, with her head on his shoulder. "Don't say anything now," he said. "You know that we both understand all that has to be said, and we'll speak of it, but not until it has ceased to hurt you quite so much."

His hand moved down the line of her sleeve, down a fold of her skirt, with so light a pressure that it seemed as if the hand did not feel the body inside the clothes, as if he were regaining possession, not of her body, but only of its vision.

"You've taken too much," he said. "So have I. Let them batter us. There's no reason why we should add to it. No matter what we have to face, there can be no suffering between the two of us. No added pain. Let that come from their world. It won't come from us. Don't be afraid. We won't hurt each other. Not now."

She raised her head, shaking it with a bitter smile—there was a desperate violence in her movement, but the smile was a sign of recovery, of the determination to face the despair.

"Hank, the kind of hell I let you go through in the last month—." Her voice was trembling.

"It's nothing, compared to the kind of hell I let you go through in the last hour." His voice was steady.

She got up, to pace the room, to prove her strength—her steps like words telling him that she was not to be spared any longer.

When she stopped and turned to face him, he rose, as if he understood her motive.

"I know that I've made it worse for you," she said, pointing at the radio.

He shook his head. "No."

"Hank, there's something I have to tell you."

"So have I. Will you let me speak first? You see, it's something I should have said to you long ago. Will you let me speak and not answer me until I finish?"

She nodded.

He took a moment to look at her as she stood before him, as if to hold the full sight of her figure, of this moment and of everything that had led them to it.

"I love you, Dagny," he said quietly, with the simplicity of an unclouded, yet unsmiling happiness.

She was about to speak, but knew that she couldn't, even if he had permitted it, she caught her unuttered words, the movement of her lips was her only answer, then she inclined her head in acceptance.

"I love you. As the same value, as the same expression, with the same pride and the same meaning as I love my work, my mills, my Metal, my hours at a desk, at a furnace, in a laboratory, in an ore mine, as I love my ability to work, as I love the act of sight and knowledge, as I love the action of my mind when it solves a chemical equation or grasps a sunrise, as I love the things I've made and the things I've felt, as *my* product, as *my* choice, as a shape of my world, as my best mirror, as the wife I've never had, as that which makes all the rest of it possible: as my power to live."

She did not drop her face, but kept it level and open, to hear and accept, as he wanted her to and as he deserved.

"I loved you from the first day I saw you, on a flatcar on a siding of Milford Station. I loved you when we rode in the cab of the first engine on the John Galt Line. I loved you on the gallery of Ellis Wyatt's house. I loved you on that next morning. You knew it. But it's I who must say it to you, as I'm saying it now—if I am to redeem all those days and to let them be fully what they were for both of us. I loved you. You knew it. I didn't. And because I didn't, I had to learn it when I sat at my desk and looked at the Gilt Certificate for Rearden Metal."

She closed her eyes. But there was no suffering in his face, nothing but the immense and quiet happiness of clarity.

"We are those who do not disconnect the values of their minds from the actions of their bodies." You said it in your broadcast tonight. But you knew it, then, on that morning in Ellis Wyatt's house. You knew that all those insults I was throwing at you were the fullest confession of love a man could make. You knew that the physical desire I was damning as our mutual shame, is neither physical nor an expression of one's body, but the expression of one's mind's deepest values, whether one has the courage to know it or not. That was why you laughed at me as you did, wasn't it?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"You said, 'I do not want your mind, your will, your being or your soul—so long as it's to me that you will come for that lowest one of your desires.' You knew, when you said it, that it *was* my mind, my will, my being and my soul that I was giving you by means of that desire. And I want to say it now, to let that morning mean what it meant: my mind, my will, my being and my soul, Dagny—yours, for as long as I shall live."

He was looking straight at her and she saw a brief sparkle in his eyes, which was not a smile, but almost as if he had heard the cry she had not uttered.

"Let me finish, dearest. I want you to know how fully I know what I am saying. I, who thought that I was fighting them, I had accepted the worst of our enemies' creed—and *that* is what I've paid for ever since, as I am paying now and as I must. I had accepted the one tenet by which they destroy a man before he's started, the killer-tenet: the breach between his mind and body. I had accepted it, like most of their victims, not knowing it, not knowing even that the issue existed. I rebelled against their creed of human impotence and I took pride in my ability to think, to act, to work for the satisfaction of my desires. But I did not know that this was virtue, I never identified it as a moral value, as the highest of moral values, to be defended above one's life, because it's that which makes life possible. And I accepted punishment for it, punishment for virtue at the hands of an arrogant evil, made arrogant solely by my ignorance and my submission.

"I accepted their insults, their frauds, their extortions. I thought I could afford to ignore them—all those impotent mystics who prattle about their souls and are unable to build a roof over their heads. I thought that the world was mine, and those jabbering incompetents were no threat to my strength. I could not understand why I kept losing every battle. I did not know that the force unleashed against me was my own. While I was busy conquering matter, I had surrendered to them the realm of the mind, of thought, of principle, of law, of values, of morality. I had accepted, unwittingly and by default, the tenet that ideas were of no consequence to one's existence, to one's work, to reality, to this earth—as if ideas were not the province of reason, but of that mystic faith which I despised. This was all they wanted me to concede. It was enough. I had surrendered that which all of their claptrap is designed to subvert and to destroy: man's reason. No, they were not able to deal with matter, to produce abundance, to control this earth. They did not have to. They controlled me.

"I, who knew that wealth is only a means to an end, created the means and let them prescribe my ends. I, who took pride in my ability to achieve the satisfaction of my desires, let them prescribe the code of values by which I judged my desires. I, who shaped matter to serve my purpose, was left with a pile of steel and gold, but with my every purpose defeated, my every desire betrayed, my every attempt at happiness frustrated.

"I had cut myself in two, as the mystics preached, and I ran my business by one code of rules, but my own life by another. I rebelled