

as a gesture of the gravest respect, as if its purpose were to give her strength; but as he held his lips, then his face, pressed to her hand, she knew that he was seeking strength from it himself.

He dropped her hand, he looked down at her face, at the frightened stillness of her eyes, he smiled, not trying to hide that his smile held suffering, anger and tenderness.

"Dagny, you want to crawl? You don't know what the word means and never will. One doesn't crawl by acknowledging it as honestly as that. Don't you suppose I know that your begging me was the bravest thing you could do? But . . . Don't ask me, Dagny."

"In the name of anything I ever meant to you . . ." she whispered, "anything left within you . . ."

In the moment when she thought that she had seen this look before, that this was the way he had looked against the night glow of the city, when he lay in bed by her side for the last time—she heard his cry, the kind of cry she had never torn from him before:

"My love, I can't!"

Then, as they looked at each other, both shocked into silence by astonishment, she saw the change in his face. It was as crudely abrupt as if he had thrown a switch. He laughed, he moved away from her and said, his voice jarringly offensive by being completely casual:

"Please excuse the mixture in styles of expression. I've been supposed to say that to so many women, but on somewhat different occasions."

Her head dropped, she sat huddled tight together, not caring that he saw it.

When she raised her head, she looked at him indifferently. "All right, Francisco. It was a good act. I did believe it. If that was your own way of having the kind of fun I was offering you, you succeeded. I won't ask you for anything."

"I warned you."

"I didn't know which side you belonged on. It didn't seem possible—but it's the side of Orren Boyle and Bertram Scudder and your old teacher."

"My old teacher?" he asked sharply.

"Dr. Robert Stadler."

He chuckled, relieved. "Oh, that one? He's the looter who thinks that his end justifies his seizure of my means." He added, "You know, Dagny, I'd like you to remember which side you said I'm on. Some day, I'll remind you of it and ask you whether you'll want to repeat it."

"You won't have to remind me."

He turned to go. He tossed his hand in a casual salute and said, "If it could be built, I'd wish good luck to the Rio Norte Line."

"It's going to be built. And it's going to be called the John Galt Line."

"What?!"

It was an actual scream; she chuckled derisively. "The John Galt Line."

"Dagny, in heaven's name, why?"

"Don't you like it?"

"How did you happen to choose that?"

"It sounds better than Mr. Nemo or Mr. Zero, doesn't it?"

"Dagny, why that?"

"Because it frightens you."

"What do you think it stands for?"

"The impossible. The unattainable. And you're all afraid of my Line just as you're afraid of that name."

He started laughing. He laughed, not looking at her, and she felt strangely certain that he had forgotten her, that he was far away, that he was laughing—in furious gaiety and bitterness—at something in which she had no part.

When he turned to her, he said earnestly, "Dagny, I wouldn't, if I were you."

She shrugged. "Jim didn't like it, either."

"What do you like about it?"

"I hate it! I hate the doom you're all waiting for, the giving up, and that senseless question that always sounds like a cry for help. I'm sick of hearing pleas for John Galt. I'm going to fight him."

He said quietly, "You are "

"I'm going to build a railroad line for him. Let him come and claim it!"

He smiled sadly and nodded. "He will."

* * *

The glow of poured steel streamed across the ceiling and broke against one wall. Rearden sat at his desk, in the light of a single lamp. Beyond its circle, the darkness of the office blended with the darkness outside. He felt as if it were empty space where the rays of the furnaces moved at will, as if the desk were a raft hanging in midair, holding two persons imprisoned in privacy. Dagny sat in front of his desk.

She had thrown her coat off, and she sat outlined against it, a slim, tense body in a gray suit, leaning diagonally across the wide armchair. Only her hand lay in the light, on the edge of the desk; beyond it, he saw the pale suggestion of her face, the white of a blouse, the triangle of an open collar.

"All right, Hank," she said, "we're going ahead with a new Rearden Metal bridge. This is the official order of the official owner of the John Galt Line."

He smiled, looking down at the drawings of the bridge spread in the light on his desk. "Have you had a chance to examine the scheme we submitted?"

"Yes. You don't need my comments or compliments. The order says it."

"Very well. Thank you. I'll start rolling the Metal."

"Don't you want to ask whether the John Galt Line is in a position to place orders or to function?"

"I don't need to. Your coming here says it."

She smiled. "True. It's all set, Hank. I came to tell you that and to discuss the details of the bridge in person."

"All right, I am curious: who are the bondholders of the John Galt Line?"

"I don't think any of them could afford it. All of them have growing enterprises. All of them needed their money for their own concerns. But they needed the Line and they did not ask anyone for help." She took a paper out of her bag. "Here's John Galt, Inc.," she said, handing it across the desk.

He knew most of the names on the list: "Ellis Wyatt, Wyatt Oil, Colorado. Ted Nielsen, Nielsen Motors, Colorado. Lawrence Hammond, Hammond Cars, Colorado. Andrew Stockton, Stockton Foundry, Colorado." There were a few from other states; he noticed the name: "Kenneth Danagger, Danagger Coal, Pennsylvania." The amounts of their subscriptions varied, from sums in five figures to six.

He reached for his fountain pen, wrote at the bottom of the list "Henry Rearden, Rearden Steel, Pennsylvania—\$1,000,000" and tossed the list back at her.

"Hank," she said quietly, "I didn't want you in on this. You've invested so much in Rearden Metal that it's worse for you than for any of us. You can't afford another risk."

"I never accept favors," he answered coldly.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't ask people to take greater chances on my ventures than I take myself. If it's a gamble, I'll match anybody's gambling. Didn't you say that that track was my first showcase?"

She inclined her head and said gravely. "All right. Thank you."

"Incidentally, I don't expect to lose this money. I am aware of the conditions under which these bonds can be converted into stock at my option. I therefore expect to make an inordinate profit—and you're going to earn it for me."

She laughed. "God, Hank, I've spoken to so many yellow fools that they've almost infected me into thinking of the Line as of a hopeless loss! Thanks for reminding me. Yes, I think I'll earn your inordinate profit for you."

"If it weren't for the yellow fools, there wouldn't be any risk in it at all. But we have to beat them. We will." He reached for two telegrams from among the papers on his desk. "There are still a few men in existence." He extended the telegrams. "I think you'd like to see these."

One of them read: "I had intended to undertake it in two years, but the statement of the State Science Institute compels me to proceed at once. Consider this a commitment for the construction of a 12-inch pipe line of Rearden Metal, 600 miles, Colorado to Kansas City. Details follow. Ellis Wyatt."

The other read: "Re our discussion of my order. Go ahead. Ken Danagger."

He added, in explanation, "He wasn't prepared to proceed at once, either. It's eight thousand tons of Rearden Metal. Structural metal. For coal mines."

They glanced at each other and smiled. They needed no further comment.

He glanced down, as she handed the telegrams back to him. The skin of her hand looked transparent in the light, on the edge of