life on one's judgment. You're not alone. Those men exist. They have always existed. There was a time when human beings crouched in caves, at the mercy of any pestilence and any storm. Could men such as those on your Board of Directors have brought them out of the cave and up to this?" He pointed at the city.

"God, no!"

"Then *there's* your proof that another kind of men does exist."

"Yes," she said avidly. "Yes."

"Think of them and forget your Board of Directors."

"Francisco, where are they now—the other kind of men?"

"Now they're not wanted."

"I want them. Oh God, how I want them!"

"When you do, you'll find them."

He did not question her about the John Galt Line and she did not speak of it, until they sat at a table in a dimly lighted booth and she saw the stem of a glass between her fingers. She had barely noticed how they had come here. It was a quiet, costly place that looked like a secret retreat; she saw a small, lustrous table under her hand, the leather of a circular seat behind her shoulders, and a niche of dark blue mirror that cut them off from the sight of whatever enjoyment or pain others had come here to hide. Francisco was leaning against the table, watching her, and she felt as if she were leaning against the steady attentiveness of his eyes.

They did not speak of the Line, but she said suddenly, looking down at the liquid in her glass:

"I'm thinking of the night when Nat Taggart was told that he had to abandon the bridge he was building. The bridge across the Mississippi. He had been desperately short of money—because people were afraid of the bridge, they called it an impractical venture. That morning, he was told that the river steamboat concerns had filed suit against him, demanding that his bridge be destroyed as a threat to the public welfare. There were three spans of the bridge built, advancing across the river. That same day, a local mob attacked the structure and set fire to the wooden scaffolding. His workers deserted him, some because they were scared, some because they were bribed by the steamboat people, and most of them because he had had no money to pay them for weeks. Throughout that day, he kept receiving word that men who had subscribed to buy the stock of the Taggart Transcontinental Railroad were cancelling their subscriptions, one after another. Toward evening, a committee, representing two banks that were his last hope of support, came to see him. It was right there, on the construction site by the river, in the old railway coach where he lived, with the door open to the view of the blackened ruin, with the wooden remnants still smoking over the twisted steel. He had negotiated a loan from those banks, but the contract had not been signed. The committee told him that he would have to give up his bridge, because he was certain to lose the suit, and the bridge would be ordered torn down by the time he completed it. If he was willing to give it up, they said, and to ferry his passengers across the river on barges, as other railroads were doing, the contract would stand and he would get the money to continue

his line west on the other shore; if not, then the loan was off. What was his answer?—they asked. He did not say a word, he picked up the contract, tore it across, handed it to them and walked out. He walked to the bridge, along the spans, down to the last girder. He knelt, he picked up the tools his men had left and he started to clear the charred wreckage away from the steel structure. His chief engineer saw him there, axe in hand, alone over the wide river, with the sun setting behind him in the west where his line was to go. He worked there all night. By morning, he had thought out a plan of what he would do to find the right men, the men of independent judgment—to find them, to convince them, to raise the money, to continue the bridge."

She spoke in a low, flat voice, looking down at the spot of light that shimmered in the liquid as her fingers turned the stem of her glass once in a while. She showed no emotion, but her voice had the intense monotone of a prayer:

"Francisco . . . if he could live through that night, what right have I to complain? What does it matter, how I feel just now? He built that bridge. I have to hold it for him. I can't let it go the way of the bridge of the Atlantic Southern. I feel almost as if he'd know it, if I let that happen, he'd know it that night when he was alone over the river . . . no, that's nonsense, but here's what I feel: any man who knows what Nat Taggart felt that night, any man living now and capable of knowing it—it's him that I would betray if I let it happen . . . and I can't."

"Dagny, if Nat Taggart were living now, what would he do?"

She answered involuntarily, with a swift, bitter chuckle. "He wouldn't last a minute!"—then corrected herself: "No, he would. He would find a way to fight them."

"How?"

"I don't know."

She noticed some tense, cautious quality in the attentive way he watched her as he leaned forward and asked, "Dagny, the men of your Board of Directors are no match for Nat Taggart, are they? There's no form of contest in which they could beat him, there's nothing he'd have to fear from them, there's no mind, no will, no power in the bunch of them to equal one-thousandth of his."

"No, of course not."

"Then why is it that throughout man's history the Nat Taggarts, who make the world, have always won—and always lost it to the men of the Board?"

"I . . . don't know."

"How could men who're afraid to hold an unqualified opinion about the weather, fight Nat Taggart? How could they seize his achievement, if he chose to defend it? Dagny, he fought with every weapon he possessed, except the most important one. They could not have won, if we—he and the rest of us—had not given the world away to them."

"Yes. You gave it away to them. Ellis Wyatt did. Ken Danagger did. I won't."

He smiled. "Who built the John Galt Line for them?"