

against the looter's attempt to set the price and value of my steel—but I let them set the moral values of my life. I rebelled against demands for an unearned wealth—but I thought it was my duty to grant an unearned love to a wife I despised, an unearned respect to a mother who hated me, an unearned support to a brother who plotted for my destruction. I rebelled against undeserved financial injury—but I accepted a life of undeserved pain. I rebelled against the doctrine that my productive ability was guilt—but I accepted, as guilt, my capacity for happiness. I rebelled against the creed that virtue is some disembodied unknowable of the spirit—but I damned you, *you*, my dearest one, for the desire of your body and mine. But if the body is evil, then so are those who provide the means of its survival, so is material wealth and those who produce it—and if moral values are set in contradiction to our physical existence, then it's right that rewards should be unearned, that virtue should consist of the undone, that there should be no tie between achievement and profit, that the inferior animals who're able to produce should serve those superior beings whose superiority in spirit consists of incompetence in the flesh.

"If some man like Hugh Akston had told me, when I started, that by accepting the mystics' theory of sex I was accepting the looters' theory of economics, I would have laughed in his face. I would not laugh at him now. Now I see Rearden Steel being ruled by human scum—I see the achievement of my life serving to enrich the worst of my enemies—and as to the only two persons I ever loved, I've brought a deadly insult to one and public disgrace to the other. I slapped the face of the man who was my friend, my defender, my teacher, the man who set me free by helping me to learn what I've learned. I loved him, Dagny, he was the brother, the son, the comrade I never had—but I knocked him out of my life, because he would not help me to produce for the looters. I'd give anything now to have him back, but I own nothing to offer in such repayment, and I'll never see him again, because it's I who'll know that there is no way to deserve even the right to ask forgiveness.

"But what I've done to you, my dearest, is still worse. Your speech and that you had to make it—that's what I've brought upon the only woman I loved, in payment for the only happiness I've known. Don't tell me that it was your choice from the first and that you accepted all consequences, including tonight—it does not redeem the fact that it was I who had no better choice to offer you. And that the looters forced you to speak, that you spoke to avenge me and set me free—does not redeem the fact that it was I who made their tactics possible. It was not their own convictions of sin and dishonor that they could use to disgrace you—it was mine. They merely carried out the things I believed and said in Ellis Wyatt's house. It was I who kept our love hidden as a guilty secret—they merely treated it for what it was by my own appraisal. It was I who was willing to counterfeit reality for the sake of appearance in their eyes—they merely cashed in on the right I had given them.

"People think that a liar gains a victory over his victim. What I've learned is that a lie is an act of self-abdication, because one surren-

ders one's reality to the person to whom one lies, making that person one's master, condemning oneself from then on to faking the sort of reality that person's view requires to be faked. And if one gains the immediate purpose of the lie—the price one pays is the destruction of that which the gain was intended to serve. The man who lies to the world, is the world's slave from then on. When I chose to hide my love for you, to disavow it in public and live it as a lie, I made it public property—and the public has claimed it in a fitting sort of manner. I had no way to avert it and no power to save you. When I gave in to the looters, when I signed their Gift Certificate, to protect you—I was still faking reality, there was nothing else left open to me—and, Dagny, I'd rather have seen us both dead than to permit them to do what they threatened. But there are no white lies, there is only the blackest of destruction, and a white lie is the blackest of all. I was still faking reality, and it had the inexorable result: instead of protection, it brought you a more terrible kind of ordeal, instead of saving your name, it forced you to offer yourself for a public stoning and to throw the stones by your own hand. I know that you were proud of the things you said, and I was proud to hear you—but that was the pride we should have claimed two years ago.

"No, you did not make it worse for me, you set me free, you saved us both, you redeemed our past. I can't ask you to forgive me, we're far beyond such terms—and the only atonement I can offer you is the fact that I am happy. That I am happy, my darling, *not* that I suffer. I am happy that I have seen the truth—even if my power of sight is all that's left to me now. Were I to surrender to pain and give up in futile regret that my own error has wrecked my past—that would be the act of final treason, the ultimate failure toward that truth I regret having failed. But if my love of truth is left as my only possession, then the greater the loss behind me, the greater the pride I may take in the price I have paid for that love. Then the wreckage will not become a funereal mount above me, but will serve as a height I have climbed to attain a wider field of vision. My pride and my power of vision were all that I owned when I started—and whatever I achieved, was achieved by means of them. Both are greater now. Now I have the knowledge of the superlative value I had missed: of my right to be proud of my vision. The rest is mine to reach.

"And, Dagny, the one thing I wanted, as the first step of my future, was to say that I love you—as I'm saying it now I love you, my dearest, with that blindest passion of my body which comes from the clearest perception of my mind—and my love for you is the only attainment of my past that will be left to me, unchanged, through all the years ahead. I wanted to say it to you while I still had the right to say it. And because I had not said it at our beginning, this is the way I have to say it—at the end. Now I'll tell you what it was that you wanted to tell me—because, you see, I know it and I accept: somewhere within the past month, you have met the man you love, and if love means one's final, irreplaceable choice, then he is the only man you've ever loved."

"Yes!" Her voice was half-gasp, half-scream, as under a physical