

## Origin of John Galt

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I.

No one comes from nowhere or from nothing. Not even John Galt.

II.

Southwestern Ohio is all cornfields in 1917. Ellen Galt was alone in a farmhouse without electricity, the labor is long, bloody, and early. There was no one else in the small house, standing by a dirty road with the nearest neighbor over a mile distant. It was late spring, and green is everywhere, shoots of corn starting to come out of the brown earth, and everything blooming.

Her husband was dead, but she doesn't know it, one of many killed in bloody waves in French field. Her husband, Steven Galt, was drafted to fight in a war that he did not believe in, nor properly understand. Why Americans should care about a war between English, French, Germans, and Russians was not easily understood, even by people with far greater knowledge of foreign affairs.

Ellen's family was from Kentucky, and they had their own fields to tend. Steven's family was dead, except for his father, John, who lived in Cincinnati. The elder John Galt visited once a week, to make sure that Ellen is provided for, and he does what work needs to be done around the house. Then, in the gloom, he would sit with Ellen, and they would drink bourbon from china cups and tell stories, tell jokes, laugh as much as they could. Then, woozy with drink, he would get on his wagon and start back to Cincinnati.

No one should have to give birth alone. And, afterwards, her body broken by the birth, she fed her baby's blood streaked head, and then she died.

The baby cried, then could not cry, because newborn babies don't have many reserves of strength.

When the elder John rode up to the house, he was already in state of shock. He had just received the telegraph of his son's death. He was sad and angry that such an idiotic war over nothing he could understand should steal the life of his only boy. At the farmhouse, he felt another stab of fear, a sinking dread, because Ellen always came out to see him. He told himself it was nothing, nothing was wrong, she was just in back, or disposed and didn't hear his horse.

He tried the door, but Ellen had locked it. John slammed his hand against the door, rattling it, calling out, and that caused the baby to give a cry. John kicked in the door, saw his daughter-in-law on a blood soaked bed, a tiny baby clutched against her corpse. He swallowed a cry, but his eyes were blurred from tears.

John pulled the baby free, held it up in his arms. He wrapped the baby in his jacket, rushed out to the wagon and made all haste for the nearest town with a hospital, which was Dayton. By the time he arrived, he was numb, again.

There, the baby was taken from him, given to nurses.

Before even a doctor came to see John Galt, policemen did. They wanted to know what happened.

John was numb, but their questions got him angry. He thought, *How dare they?* He was sullen, unresponsive.

One of the police officers said, "Sir, it's important for us to understand what happened. You've got to understand, it's mighty strange for a person to come to us with a babe in arms, nearly dead."

John said, "It ain't none of your business."

The other officer said, "Sir, we need to be able to say that no crime was committed. We've got to know why that babe is in such a rough way. So, where did you get the child?"

John closed his eyes. His temples throbbed. Red spots flickered in the darkness behind his eyes. He said, "It ain't none of your business."

The police officers stepped away to discuss what they needed to do. They agreed that it was probably just exhaustion and worry that made John Galt so touchy. But was probably good enough? The

nurses said the child was covered in blood. Who's blood? Both were experienced police officers. They could come up with too many scenarios where maybe wasn't enough. They decided to try again more forcefully.

"Sir, if you don't tell us your story, so we can check it, I'm afraid we're going to have to bring you in for further questioning," the senior-most officer said.

John Galt looked at the two police officers and said, "Then you can go right to Hell."

John Galt did not fight when he was arrested. When taken down to the station, he refused to say anything at all, though a search of him came up with a wallet that had a library card with his name on it.

A detective interviewed John Galt. John spat on the floor, right at the man's feet, and said, "I don't have to talk to the likes of you."

The detective: "We're just trying to get to the bottom of what happened with the baby, Mr. Galt. If you'd just cooperate, I'm sure you'll be out of here in no time at all."

John Galt leaned back, said nothing, just stared at the detective with a cold, blue-eyed stare. He shook his head: *No*.

The detective sent out the officers with one question: *Who is John Galt?*

III.

The police searched for all the Galts, found Steven and Ellen's marriage license. They went out to the address listed where they found Ellen's body. The coroner said that Ellen had died in childbirth, a common enough tragedy. There was no reason to think that John Galt had anything to do with it.

John Galt was freed. Not once had he asked about his grandson. The first thing he did was go to the hospital, though.

The baby was fine, suffering nothing more serious than a little dehydration. The police had explained the situation to the hospital, and the doctor in charge of Baby Galt asked who the next of kin would be—where's the father?

"The father's dead in the war," John said. "Which makes the child mine, I suppose." He didn't know how to get into contact with Ellen's people, anyway, even if he had a mind to do so. Which he didn't.

They filled out the birth certificate. John thought about naming the boy after his dead son, but couldn't bear to do it. "Let's call him John Galt."

IV.

Young John Galt grew up in a church. Old John Galt was a preacher of that old time religion. He preached fire and brimstone, and a wrathful, jealous God. Old John's bright green eyes burned as he looked straight into people, then straight through them, staring past them as if they did not exist. Old John lived in a world of angels and demons. He lived in a world of mystery and magic. But most of all, Old John Galt lived in a world of absolute certainty. Old Johnny Galt was sure he was absolutely, inerrantly correct.

Before all else, Old John Galt told his grandson that the greatest evil in the world was the government. The government had fought in a war that didn't concern them. No German had ever come to America to hurt any American, and that's why it was the government's fault that John's father was dead. And if John's father had been by his wife's side, she would have had someone to help her, and she'd be alive, too. Even as a very young boy, the young John understood that his parents were dead because of the government, that they were murderers.

The worst thing the government did, though, even worse than war, was taxation. Taxation made all men slaves, not just to the government, but to each other. Old John asked why someone down the road should be able to take bread out of his mouth simply because they were hungry? Young John asked if wasn't their Christian duty to feed the hungry. Young Johnny Galt was very quick. Old John said that while it was a Christian's duty to love everyone, by taking his bread in that way, the hungry man had become a thief rather than trusting in the Lord. In this way, he did not deserve the Lord's mercy, for to sin against the Lord is a sin of terrible and infinite proportions. Old John Galt did not owe a hungry man,

he did not owe a homeless one, and when the hungry man or homeless man accepted government handouts that man was being a party to selling his brothers into slavery.

“And he that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he shall be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death,” Old John quoted. “Exodus 21:16. All of those that take from the font of taxes for their own benefit are guilty of enslaving the men from whom those taxes were taken. Because taxation is slavery.”

The young John’s second memories were of sermons. The sting of his grandfather’s words, the heavy thump of his Bible on the pulpit to demonstrate a point. Young John didn’t understand the words, but he understood that his grandfather had an amazing power. He spoke and people listened. It didn’t matter what Old John Galt said, even if it didn’t make any sense, even if it contradicted what he had said earlier to the same audience, people listened and they believed.

They also acted. They gave money. They came over to do Reverend Galt’s yard work, widows came over with food, they patched his clothes, made sure that little Johnny wanted for nothing, either. Old John accepted this as his due, and the younger John accepted it, too. Some men lead, others served. It was the natural order. Though it was never said, it was well understood by everyone at Galt’s church: *You owe me for the things I do.*

Old John didn’t just preach against the evils of the flesh and spirit, or rail against the government, he also preached against communism. The communists were without God, damned to hell, and they opposed that most American of institutions: business. There was nothing worse than the shiftless communists, they were inspired by Satan, himself, to strike down all that was pure and good in the world. Old John attacked not just the communists, but anyone who harbored the least bit of socialism, unionism, anarchism, progressivism. To hear Old John Galt speak, the Bible was clear: industrialists were the favored servants of Jesus, because their hard work was a reflection of His Passion. To stop them in their work was the same as lashing Jesus or putting the spear in His side.

Though a preacher by profession, Old John Galt loved businessmen. While it was nice that the congregation would do his yardwork, his housework, cook his meals, make presents of clothes, and things of this kind, John Galt got big fat checks from businessmen. It was the Roaring 20s, and money was sprouting up everywhere, and Old John Galt made sure some of it got into his pockets, and he

invested it because he thought that the stock market was divinely ordained. It was where worth was created in this world.

Little Johnny watched this, too. He was a big-eyed boy, whip thin, quiet as a mouse, but he listened and he learned. The men with the checkbooks said a great deal more than was ever said with words. They said to Old John Galt: *You owe us.*

One of the widows had a daughter who would come around to do daily chores. At that age, little Johnny Galt didn't understand why his grandfather would take her into the basement and lock tight the door. Afterwards, the young woman would come up, adjusting her dress, her face flushed, eyes bright, smiling. That, too, said, *You owe me.*

V.

When he was six years old, John Galt was gifted a radio kit. It was a life transforming experience. Listening to the tinny speaker, he heard news, songs, stories. But even more amazing, to his mind, was that invisible and otherwise silent radio waves could be snatched from the air and tamed. He realized he was surrounded by invisible but tangible forces, radio waves and gravity. The air was full of electricity, and when the cloud grew dark it flickered and flashed from cloud to cloud, and to the ground, with such fury that it could be heard miles away.

Old John didn't think much of the radio, thinking it was just a toy. One of the businessmen in Old John congregation, Jake Miller, who fixed radios and other electronic devices, encouraged young John. He gave the little boy kits and magazines, answered questions, and found that young John Galt didn't need to be told anything twice.

For Christmas when he was eight, Jake Miller got John Galt a physics primer. There was no possible way for John to understand it at that age, but he was fascinated by the world it described. It seemed more amazing than his grandfather's world of angels and demons. Everything around us was incredible forces, outside, inside, shooting through us at unimaginable speeds. It was a dazzling world and John Galt wanted to be part of it. More than anything.

When young John's passion started to eclipse his interest in Scripture, though, Old John put down his foot. It was one thing to fiddle around with a radio, it was another thing to let bits of crystal and wire serve as a gateway to idolatry.

Young John didn't understand why his grandfather should be so opposed to physics. Did he not teach that the world was full of unseen forces that could, nevertheless, be sensed by those with the proper faith and vision? If God made everything, then God made those invisible forces, then God made radio waves, gravity, and electricity. God made the magnets to pull together or push apart, to seek the poles, to use and command those invisible forces as it was man's duty and privilege to master all the forces of this world.

Old John called it nonsense, "fiddle-faddle, pure applesauce". Old John threw out the primer, but young John fetched it back, and hid it away in the shed behind the house.

Young John now served two masters. And no one can do that.

VI.

Young John loved going up to Dayton, Ohio. Young John knew about the exploits of the Wright Brothers – the first to fly! And around Wright Field there were always airplanes taking off and landing, and exhibitions, test flights, races. In 1929, when young John was twelve years old, his grandfather drove him by the field where was always the roar of aircraft. It was October, and the leaves had turned, and everything was red and gold, nature was in all her glory.

Young John: "They're testing superchargers, I've heard, to give sea level pressure at thirty thousand feet. It means we'll have the fastest planes in the world, and the ones that can go highest."

Old John frowned. He indulged his grandson, but wished he would grow out of his fascination with machines and science. Dayton was not the place to grow out of those interests. The city was a hotbed of invention, almost fevered in pace. Not just aviation, but also automobiles and other industries, where Dayton inventors invented electric self-starters for automobiles, a continuous wide rolling steel mill, the cash register, self-contained refrigerator, and a great deal more. Not only was there considerable science to be had, but a practical application in the service of invention.

Old John: "Those are government planes. The government enslaves people. They killed your father, and that killed your mother."

That made young John frown, his brows coming together.

They spent the day visiting people Old John knew, before circling around to downtown Dayton to shop. They would livery their horse, and return the next day, staying in a small hotel next to the Packard dealership in town. Young John looked forward to this, because he could sneak out – even just across the street. The people at the Packard dealership would let him up to the chauffeur's lounge, where they would give him a nickel to fetch them sandwiches and hot dogs from a few blocks down.

The chauffeurs would drink bootleg moonshine and beer, play card games, waiting for their masters to get done with the better heeled nightclubs and lounges that were a few streets over. They would curse and swagger, talk of their exploits, talk about their cars – beautiful, elegant, powerful. Those cars symbolized the apex of prosperity to young John. To not only own a functional piece of art, but to command someone to go where you wished, to do as you say, seemed absolute Heaven to John. A Heaven far more interesting than anything Old John's sermons described.

But that evening, before John could sneak off, Jake Miller burst through the hotel door. He was wild eyed. He said, "Did you see it, John?"

Old John: "See what?"

"The market, the market has collapsed! It's chaos on Wall Street, and banks are shutting down everywhere!"

"What's that to me?"

Jake gripped old John's lapels. "You deposit checks in the First Dayton Bank, you idiot! It shut down! They don't have any money! Everything you have is gone, you moron!"

Old John pushed Jake away, then hit him in the stomach. Jake bent over, almost fell, gasping. Old John picked up Jake by the lapels, then. He pushed the smaller man up against a wall. Old John said, "You told me that bank was safe as houses. You told me that my money was safe."

"It's gone," Jake said, wild-eyed, terrified. "It's gone."

"I should kill you."

"The money won't come back. It's gone."

Old John threw Jake down. "Get out of here, and a curse on you and your thieving ways."

Jake scrambled out, looking at young John, saying he was sorry with his eyes.

Old John slammed the door shut. He put a hand over his face, trembling all over. Then he cursed, tore off his belt, and started thrashing young John. He screamed, "You did this, you did this, you and your damned books and radios and questions and foolishness! You did this!"

Young John covered his face with his arms and the leather slashed at him, bruises, welts rising on his arms, a cut on his forehead where the edge of the belt slashed him.

Young John: "I'm sorry! I didn't know! I didn't know!"

But young John did know: he had nothing to do with it. Nothing at all. But it wasn't the first time that Old John had kicked his ass, and it wouldn't be the last, and it was best to tell him he was right even when he wasn't.

V.

John Galt didn't suffer very much during the Depression. Despite Old John losing everything his savings, the religion business boomed during the opening years of the Depression. Young John Galt saw people give their last penny to Old John when the collection plate came around.

Old John didn't stop his attacks on communists. He said it was the Jewish bankers who were responsible for the Depression, that the Jews were allies of the communists, and intentionally destroyed the American economy in order to weak their enemy. So giving to Jesus – through Old John, of course – was a way to stop the Jewish communist bankers from enslaving the world.

Young John did not see what the Jews had to do with it. He read the newspapers, and came to the conclusion that Black Tuesday was because of excessive government regulation of banks. One of the young real estate bankers who adopted this view was Michael Mulligan, who would go on to buy foreclosed farms and make millions of dollars while the country starved. John Galt would admire him greatly.

These sermons influenced young John strongly, but in other ways his relationship with his grandfather was falling apart. After Black Tuesday, Old John started to drink heavily, and his affairs with

girls from the congregation were virtually an open matter – but no one seemed to care. Young John was fascinated by the collective turning away as Old John cavorted freely with whatever girl caught his eye. But young John felt it was disgusting, because it was all lies and hypocrisy.

Young John got away from his grandfather at every opportunity. Mostly, he went over to Jake Miller's shop, riding his bicycle for two hours. Perhaps because of the Depression, Jake's electronic's shop did pretty good business – people were more interested in fixing something than replacing it. John could read his physics book, ask Jake to clarify things, and even work on simple jobs. Over time, the jobs that John Galt could do got more complex. John had a very good sense for electronics, but in his mind he was sorting out all the physics involved. Much of it was mysterious, all electro-magnetism was a strange and counter-intuitive world where the logic and reasoning of the human-scale world was upended.

More than anything, it was that strange disconnection from everyday reasoning that fascinated John. The idea that the world was not as people told him it was – that under the surface, common reason was inverted. And only the special people – people of great and unique intelligence – could apprehend it. People like him.

Jake's shop was on a paved road of three story red brick buildings, and around that the street were houses and fields. Across the street was a ice cream and soda shop. When John finished a bit of work, Jake would give him a bit of money, and he'd race across the street – dodging cars and carts – to get something sweet.

The store's owner had a daughter, a year older than John. She was taller than him with dark brown hair and sharp blue eyes. Despite being pretty, and literally living above an ice cream store, she wasn't popular because she had a sharp tongue and preferred to read above all other things.

One day, with a cup of ice cream, John sat across from her. "What are you reading?"

"You wouldn't understand," she said.

"Try me."

She showed John the spine of her book. It was a slim book titled *Tractacus Logico-Philosophicus*. She said, "It's about language."

"What do you mean?"

"In the sense of determining a relationship between language and objects of language."

John looked at her blankly. He ate his ice cream. She went back to reading.

Eventually, John said, "Isn't this relationship self-evident? The reason we make words is to talk about things in the world."

The girl looked at him over the book. Slowly, she got her bookmark, put it in her book, and set her book down. She said, "No."

"Are you going to keep me in suspense or are you going to tell me?"

She looked slightly vexed, but said, "When does a hill become a mountain?"

John said, "When it's a thousand feet tall."

"So a hill that is nine hundred and ninety-nine feet tall is fundamentally, linguistically different than a hill one foot taller? Even though it takes a surveying team to distinguish between that difference?"

John made a face. He kept eating his ice cream. The girl went back to reading her book.

When he was at the bottom of his cup, he said, "Yes. Because that's how we define the word. If it were not true, then the word hill and mountain would have no meaning, linguistic or otherwise. A thing is what a thing is."

She looked at him, smiled a little. "You'd like Aristotle."

John laughed. "I don't think that I could get away with him. My grandfather says that all the Greeks were pederasts."

The girl raised an eyebrow. "Who's your grandfather?"

"Reverend Galt."

"Ah," she said, looking back at her book. "I don't believe in God."

John was stunned. He had never met anyone who said they don't believe in God. He said, "Then who made the world?"

"I don't know. But my present ignorance does not justify imagining that an old man in the sky wiggled his fingers, said fiat lux, and there was a world."

John was flabbergasted. He stammered, nothing came out. The girl watched him over her book, her eyes cold and indifferent to his emotional and intellectual turmoil.

"How did we come into this world?"

"Chance," she said. She smiled a bit. "Evolution. As to the rest? I do not know, but I do know that the world is full of fuzzy-headed mystics spouting nonsense, each one pointing at the other and saying that their ancient fable of magic is better than the other person's. From the Hellenic Gaia to Odin splitting a giant's skull, to Jehovah parting the waters of night – they are all stories equally improbable, and equally without support. Why would any thinking, rational person believe these magical fairy tales when we live in a world so utterly devoid of magic. If we were a reasonable species, we would be more concerned with the Japanese army in China."

John had no answer. He put his bowl in the pan by the door, and said, "What's your name?"

"Nancy."

"Well, Nancy, I'll think of something."

"What's your name?"

"John."

"Well, John, I'll look forward to that."

VI.

John asked Jake about Aristotle. Jake had a book about Aristotle, gave it to John, who read it.

A week later, he got a bowl of ice cream, sat across from Nancy and said, "All reasoning people must agree that there are things in this world that are imperishable and eternal, else there would be no world, because it would all perish. It follows that this eternal and imperishable material is the primary motive force of creation, and that is God."

Nancy put down her book. "Oooh. You found some Aristotle after all, preacher's boy, and maybe a little Aquinas. Fancy that. But it's nonsense because you don't believe in a Prime Mover. You believe in Jehovah, and Jesus, beings with attributes far different than the Prime Mover. Nothing in the Prime Mover about sin, or Jesus." Nancy grew sly. "I mean, have you ever asked yourself what Heaven is like?"

"In the presence of the Lord, we sing his eternal glories."

"Does anyone do that now, today? Just sit around singing the glories of God all day long?"

John admitted they did not. Even the most religious people did not sing God's praises constantly.

"Then what changes in Heaven, John? Does God compel people to do something there that they have no interest in doing here, or do they change once they're in Heaven so that they find this music the highest pleasure? And if that is true, are they even the same person, having been changed so much by God?"

John sat and ate his ice cream, looking at the bowl.

Nancy: "Or what about the question of evil?"

John whispered, "I don't know what that is."

"God is all good, right? Omnibenevolent?"

John nodded.

"God is all-powerful, right? And all-knowing?"

John nodded again, not liking where this was going, but feeling like he should.

"Then how does evil exist? Either God allows evil to exist, and is therefore not omnibenevolent, or evil exists despite the power of God, thus God is not omnipotent."

John was fixed by Nancy's stare. He said, "I . . . I don't know."

"And none of this has the least little bit to do with the Prime Mover. The Prime Mover could just as easily be a mindless force as a divine personality, meting out punishment from the sky."

VII.

John talked to Jake about what Nancy said. Jake told John, "You should avoid that girl. She's evil."

But John could not forget Nancy. He saw her in his dreams. He had never met anyone as clever as her, and he had fantasies about her. He wondered how she smelled, which had nothing to do with her mind. He fantasized about her skin, and her breasts, and what she would look like nude. He imagined her surrendering to him, he masturbated to this fantasy, her writhing beneath him, her filled up by his power, acknowledging that he was her superior.

Sundays, listening to Old John preach, young John found himself bored. It was like Nancy infected him with something, an idea that he could not escape. Young John had, of course, read the Bible. He had to admit that much of it didn't make sense, but people asserted it did. They said that Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies of the Old Testament, but that struck John as untrue, or at least a very wide and improbable interpretation. And many of the arguments that people used to talk about God came from older sources – Greek and Roman sources, which argued for other gods, or sometimes no god at all.

At night, sometimes, he was totally honest with himself: he knew that his growing disbelief was driven by a teenager's lust for Nancy. Then he had elaborate fantasies where Nancy gave him everything he wanted, body and soul. In the daylight, he convinced himself that wasn't true, that his desire for her was in accord with the highest forms of reason. Eventually, his daytime lies defeated his nighttime honesty.

After about a year, when John was fifteen, and Nancy sixteen, he snuck out of his room and went over to the ice cream store. He knew which room belonged to Nancy, and tossed pebbles up to tink against her window until she opened it up. She was in a nightgown, her hair streaming down one side of her face.

She said, "What is it? It's past midnight, John Galt!"

"I want to see you. Come down."

She hesitated, then relented. "Meet me in back."

John went into the back alley, and Nancy opened the door, and John slipped in. He had worked himself into a fever. In the year they'd known each other, John had grown taller than Nancy, and bigger. No sooner had the door closed than John pushed Nancy up against a wall and kissed her on the mouth.

After a moment's shock, Nancy pushed back. But John was bigger, stronger, and her consent did not matter. He kissed her, against, he started to pull up her nightgown, seeing her pale legs in the wan light, he felt like his cock would burst inside his pants.

Then Nancy bit his lip, hard, and clawed at his eyes. John cried out, lashed out, hit her in the stomach. Nancy doubled over and John pushed her down, holding her arms above her head.

Nancy's voice trembled. She said, "I'll scream, and my father will come down and he will kill you, John Galt."

That cut John's strings. This wasn't how it was supposed to be. She was supposed to want it, to want him, to acknowledge his strength and intelligence. She did not. She was terrified, he felt her trembling under him, and John felt his strength over her. Her eyes were full of hatred and contempt. He no longer felt like his cock would burst free, he felt his testicles retracting in shame and self-loathing.

He ran away from her and the shop and never came back.

VIII.

He told Jake, as he approached his sixteenth year, "I need to leave, Jake. I can't stand my grandfather anymore. He's a thief, he takes advantage of people's credulity, and he robs them. He takes advantage of the women of his congregation, and everyone knows, and no one says anything. I . . . I don't believe the things he believes. I want to get away from here, I want to be a scientist or engineer, to work with electricity."

Jake listened, heard him, and nodded. "You're a man, now. You are free to do what you please. But, listen, the days are bad. It takes money to go to a university."

"I'll work to pay my way. I'll do anything, I don't care what."

"It's hard to get a job, John, but if you've got the money, I know someone at Patrick Henry University, up in Cleveland. It's a great school. I think I can get you in."

"How much money will I need?"

"More than a thousand dollars."

"I'll get it."

John Galt went back to his room in his grandfather's house, sat in his chair, facing the window, and thought long and hard. He told himself that though he did believe in God that he was nevertheless a highly moral man. He did not think of Nancy, and his attack, or her contempt – those thoughts arose only in his dreams, where she never submitted to him, and where she always won. He knew where to get the money, he had only to take it. After Black Tuesday, Old John kept his money beneath some boards in his room. Young John knew which ones. He was sure there was at least a thousand dollars in there. Old John paid for next to nothing, preferring the charity of his congregation, and he hoarded their money.

Young John felt it was disgusting, how the old preacher controlled people with his stories and lies, but he felt an equal or greater contempt for the people who allowed themselves to be swindled with his stories and lies.

Old John's money wasn't his, young John reasoned, because it was obtained by trickery. But the people who gave it to him deserved their suffering and poverty because they allowed themselves to be tricked. They were beyond the circle of his morality, because they chose mysticism over reality.

Through Jake Miller, John Galt applied to Patrick Henry University, and was accepted. They were both careful to hide his application from Old John. Once his application was in hand, and Old John was out at the church, young John went into Old John's room, pulled up the boards, and took the strongbox. A few blows from a hammer broke the lock, and inside was nearly three thousand dollars. He took every penny, turned on the gas in one room and lit a candle in another room.

He wasn't there for the explosion. He was already headed to Cleveland.

IX.

Hugh Akston had tenure at Patrick Henry. His doctoral thesis was in language theory, where he persuasively argued for the existence of a logically perfect language, and on the basis of his thesis got tenure at Patrick Henry. Shortly thereafter, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and others conclusively discredited Akston's works. Afterward, Akston came to teach the work of the analytical philosophers represented an attack not only his philosophy, but against reason itself. The conclusive impossibility of a logically complete natural language was not, in Akston's opinion, a sign of advanced human reason, but a meaningless, fuzzy-headed mysticism.

He was not a major philosopher. His screeds were occasionally published, but universally panned. His work in language was seen as outdated, but he was an extremely charismatic teacher, and students loved him because he said shocking things with incredible panache. With his students, he characterized his failures as proof of how philosophy and society had turned away from the "rational" with their acceptance of phenomenology. Over time, he began asserting that Aristotle was the last true philosopher – Aristotle and Hugh Akston. He taught that human intelligence and perception were

potentially infallible and infinite, capable of grasping any subtlety, no matter how complex, remote, or infinitesimal. Despite claiming that reality was the final arbiter of all disagreements, he was not particularly interested in mind-bending complexities of quantum mechanics or relativity. Indeed, he tended to conflate astronomy's relativity with moral relativity, saying they drew from the same well, and the "nonsensical" conclusions of Einsteinian relativity – despite the copious and growing body of evidence demonstrating the validity of Einstein's work – gave birth to moral relativism, and were proof that Einstein could not be right. While Akston's ideas were without merit, they were nevertheless well-received by his undergraduate audiences. Few people understood Einstein, after all, who never deigned to notice Hugh Akston's attacks against him.

(Akston tried something similar with quantum mechanics, but gave it up because it was increasingly clear that light was both a wave and a particle, which completely destroyed Aristotelian categories. Nothing was supposed to be two things, completely two things, at the same time. But the more research piled up the weirder the quantum world became – events turned probabilistic instead of deterministic, causes could come before and after results, particles could be in two places at the same time. It went against his Aristotelian logic, and rather than confront that there was a growing body of empirical evidence saying that the universe didn't give a damn about what some old Greek philosopher thought the world should be like, Akston found it easy to ignore.)

John Galt admired Hugh Akston above all other men, and found in his love of Akston two others: Ragnar Danneskjold and Francisco d'Anaconia.

It was Francisco who introduced John to Robert Statler, a famous physics professor. Statler's work was generally characterized as being about "cosmic rays", but it was actually concerning the physical interface of the Van Allen radiation belt and the earth in what was called the Pederson current. The high energy particles caught in the Van Allen belt were captured in field aligned currents and brought into the earth's atmosphere and then they "jumped" to the other side of the current to be swept away into space – and the area where the high energy plasma jumped sides of the Van Allen belt were the Pederson currents. A great deal of energy was contained in the plasma, and Statler hoped to some day tap into the immense electrical potential to lift the earth out of dependence on fossil fuels.

Statler, of course, since he worked in electro-magnetism, was well-versed in quantum mechanics. It was possible that Akston would have run afoul of Statler if Akson had not shied away from all things quantum – as it was, Statler didn't have a lot of respect for Akston's frivolous attacks on Einstein. While he was popular with John, Ragnar, and Francisco, he thought their admiration of Hugh Akston was unfortunate, and he did not seek nearly so much to be a father figure to them.

John was a quick student, the quickest that Statler had, even better than his graduate students. Before the end of the first year, John ignored the undergraduate classes and worked exclusively with graduate students and graduate problems. While Francisco and Ragnar took every undergraduate course that Statler offered, it was John who was Statler's special favorite.

Still, they were not close emotionally. Statler was not particularly interested in politics, and John burned fiercely with it. The New Deal infuriated John, who saw it as the kind of slavery that his grandfather warned him about – the wealth of people who were able to work was being drained to pay for the less able. By taking the labor of others, starving people became slaveholders in John's eyes.

Francisco and Ragnar fed this to John, too.

Francisco, in particular, came from a culture where property owners had nearly unlimited power on their estates and properties. Francisco was in profound denial about how people were treated in his father's mines. Francisco said his father was a fair, if hard, man, and his workers respected him. In truth, Francisco's father paid his workers in company script which could then be redeemed for goods sold in the company store at extortionate rates, or be redeemed for actual money at even worse rates. His miners quickly became eternally indebted to the company, their income being unable to support even an extremely modest lifestyle. Then, the company would loan them money with interest rates so high that freedom from debt became an ever receding possibility. The "respect" that Francisco saw from his father's workers was the caution that a debt-slave shows to their master. To the extent that Francisco acknowledged the company store system, it was paternalistically – the foolish peasants in his father's employ could not make intelligent money decisions, so forcing them to buy everything at the company store was to their own benefit. Yes, the company made further profit on these sales, but profit was the life's blood of industry, and at least a responsible party, his father, was making sure that the workers got what they needed. And if workers grew in debt? Why, that was on them, of course. No one forced them

to work the mines, and Francisco did not give second thought to what jobs an illiterate worker with no money might otherwise get in the Andes.

Ragnar, on the other hand, bolstered John's disbelief. Ragnar's father was a bishop in the Norwegian Lutheran Church, which was a tax supported organization. Ragnar – a strident atheist, himself – regaled John with stories of debauchery that fit very well with how Old John behaved. Stories of orgies, wife swappings, simony, embezzlement were luridly described. Ragnar was also the most physical of the three. While Francisco and John were thin, Ragnar was strong. He loved physical exertion, especially contests of strength, and he wrestled as much as he could. He also had a great love for a pretty face, and unlike the other two, he didn't put so many bizarre conditions on his relationships. He liked girls, girls liked him, and that was about as much thought that he put into it.

But as John was to Robert Statler, Ragnar was to Hugh Akston. And through Ragnar, Francisco and John were treated as sons by Akston. And each of them, in their own way, wanted a father.

John, of course, never knew his father and while his grandfather loomed enormous in his mind and life, they were estranged. Ragnar and his father had never gotten along, Ragnar's willfulness constantly abutted his father's Lutheran discipline and rules. Francisco's father was distant, a remote figure demanding much and giving nothing. While success might give Francisco a reprieve from his father's scorn, it never got him praise.

Of the three, though, John was most desperate for the kind of male attention that Akston gave. Ragnar and Francisco had complex relationships with their father, but John had none at all. His father was a fantasy, and in his mind, John gave him all possible attributes. Of the three, John was the least interested in philosophy, but formed the closest personal relationship with Akston.

But, professionally, John Galt worked more closely with Robert Statler. The Pederson current was strong enough to power the world several times over, and research might allow them to tame the Van Allen radiation belt, whose energy was nearly boundless.

Over the years of their work together, John became convinced that it would take many serious advanced in technology to tap into the Pederson current, if it was capable at all. But with slight modification, it could be used to tap into atmospheric electricity.

Relatively speaking, there wasn't nearly as much atmospheric electrical potential as power in the Pederson current. All of his life, John would claim that the energy was "limitless", but the most powerful expression of electrical current in the atmosphere – lightning – released the equivalent of about 2500 kilowatt hours. The average house could use that in a year, and while there was often hundred and occasionally even thousands of times the energy potential contained in the atmosphere, it was very, very far from limitless.

Of course, if it could be gotten at cheaply, the fact it wasn't limitless was irrelevant. It would be another useful source of energy.

It never occurred to John to wonder what might happen to the atmosphere if one drained all electrical potential from it. Not even for a minute.

Nor did it occur to him to mention this advance to Statler. While John's advance was not what Statler was looking for – not precisely – it was a very interesting line of study. John Galt was John Galt, and even though Statler had gone far beyond the boundaries of the student-teacher relationship on behalf of John, there was no thought in John's mind of reciprocation.

Among his friends, it wasn't long at all before John was their leader. In all-night symposiums, along with Akston, who was convinced these three students were the finest he ever had, they convinced themselves to fuck the world.

All of them were conservative, even reactionary, to start with. Both Francisco and Ragnar had enormous misplaced aristocracy – they learned for the days where people in their station had unrelieved authority over their property: when lords of the land could kill peasants for tiny infractions of the law, and the idea that a lord could not dispose of his land as he pleased occurred to no one, and damn everyone downstream. For his part, John had learned his whole life that taxation was morally identical to slavery, that the government was the embodiment of every evil in the world, and that they were personally responsible for killing his mother and father.

Without Hugh Akston, it is highly likely that they would have become nothing more than garden variety assholes, but what they felt was felt by Akston, too. He wanted to show all those "anti-reason" philosophers that the absolutes in which he believed were all identical.

It would take a long time to discuss everything that was wrong with Akston's beliefs, or how he shaped the minds of these three young men. They lumped everything they didn't like – taxes, religion, government regulation of business, all Asian philosophy, contempt for Immanuel Kant, communism, the New Deal, and many more – into one category. They were transformed into “collectivists”, then “mystics”. Everything they stood for – atheism, laissez-faire capitalism, the gold standard, economic aristocracy, and more – became absolute standard not just for morality, but economics, and even how they interacted with the material world. Their beliefs became absolute premises that they identified with the law of identity. Their beliefs were transformed into the primordial laws of the universe, and when something didn't agree with their beliefs (much included most psychology, sociology, and even the theory of evolution) then that belief was wrong.

They said to each other “check your premises”, but what it meant was “construct an argument, no matter how convoluted and fabulous, to structure your preferences to our set of arbitrarily contrived but also absolute premises”. It was childishness mated with research, given the go ahead by a professional philosopher who should have known better, but was driven by an immense wounded ego.

They quickly became experts in this form of argumentation. They would come to each other's defense, too, overwhelming doubters with spurious arguments advanced so forcefully that people retreated from them rather than engage – except those who agreed with them. A small group formed around the three, who liked the ideology of selfishness and greed that let them do as they please without a pang of conscience.

X.

In John Galt's senior year – it was 1938 – and Nancy came to Patrick Henry University. She had completed an undergraduate at Scripps College and been accepted to the Patrick Henry University's medical school. She wanted to be a doctor. On the third day of classes, John Galt saw her coming out of a building, going down a short flight of stairs, laughing, saying something over her shoulder.

She was still a lovely brunette, though in California she had taken up tennis, and when she moved John could see the muscles in her arms shifting tightly under a tanned skin.

Francisco was with John. He followed John's eyes. He said, "She is a beautiful girl."

"Yes," John said, moving back into a patch of shade.

Francisco didn't notice this, and Nancy didn't notice either of them, turning down a path that took her away from them and breaking into an easy run. Francisco said, "She looks like Dagny, but more... energetic. I can't imagine the last time that Dagny deigned to run."

Francisco turned back to John, raised a questioning eyebrow.

John said, "Don't ask about it."

Francisco shrugged a very little. "As you say, my friend."

John asked around the building, found that Nancy was in medical school, but it was far too early for anyone to really have any particular feeling about her.

Nancy, a graduate student, didn't live on campus. She rented a room close to campus – a large house that catered to female graduate students at the university. It was one of those materialistic residences. Despite all of the women there being fully adult, the landlady had a list of arbitrary rules: no boys except on the first floor, and not before noon or after nine, and all the young ladies had to be back by eleven, and no cigarettes or alcohol allowed on the premises. Nancy generally walked to the university, and she tooted around town on her bicycle. She joined a local tennis league, she ran five miles every morning before classes. She didn't have a boyfriend, though she was a popular invitee to parties because she was pretty and vivacious. She quickly developed a circle of friends, all of them young women, and she was devoted to her studies.

John learned this because he spied on her. Since the day he saw her, she was always on his mind. As he charted her movements, took notes on her friends and acquaintances – and every time she spoke to a young man, he had to fight a hot spike of fury that stabbed right through him – he said it was simply to learn how best to approach her. He struck up conversations with people who knew her to pump them of information.

While John's thoughts were all on Nancy, the world around him was talking about war. Day by day, it seemed more and more likely that there would be a military confrontation with Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Hitler was a near constant topic of conversation.

John, Francisco, and Ragnar didn't see what the fuss was about. Hitler seemed to know how to treat industry, letting them crush unions and communists. In their eyes, the way he allowed businesses to flourish seemed the way forward. While none of them warmed to the racism inherent in Nazism, much of the philosophy of national socialism appealed to them, particularly the paternalism of industry. They liked it that Hitler encouraged business leaders to take the mental and spiritual wellbeing of their employees into account, without government interference. And they hated the Treaty of Versailles as the most abject form of collectivist mysticism ever written, suppressing the economic rights of the noble German people.

Of course, one of the things Americans don't like to admit is how many agreed with Hitler. After the fact, Americans treated the pre-war period like we were insistent and uniformly against Hitler and the Nazis – but there was a strong nativist political faction who was with Hitler. And many others found the “racial science” of the Nazis to be their common sense validated by “science”, and were glad that someone was aggressively pushing for the racial purity of the white race against the hordes of mud people that surrounded them at every turn. While John, Francisco, and Ragnar were not any more racist than their society, they were no less racist, either. They accepted it as a given that the white race was the superior race, the proper and true kind of human, and everyone else was born with defects that could not be corrected – they were either too big, or too small, too hairy, or not hairy enough, and given to either an excess of passion or were altogether emotionless. White was just right, and clearly intellectually superior, which was exceptionally important to the trio.

The only thing, in particular, that they disliked was that Hitler placed any restrictions on business at all. Though they spoke the language of freedom, Hitler's oppression of it didn't faze them. If they were being honest to themselves, while they spoke broadly about freedom, they were motivated by a hatred of the New Deal and not Prohibition.

Nancy diverged from the Galtian ideal at every turn. When he followed her, sometimes she went to a black college where she socialized with black men. She drank with them, too, and she liked jazz music. Ragnar and Francisco agreed with John that jazz music was intellectually improper. She also volunteered at a free clinic in the worst part of the city, no doubt where she met all the black people, and she showed considerable kindness to everyone in the clinic. Worse, the clinic was associated with a

church, even though John knew she was a non-believer, which meant that she sacrificed her ethics. That she “sacrificed her ethics” in order to help poor people get medical treatment was irrelevant; John Galt would let every bum in Cleveland die a lingering, painful death before he stepped into a church, again.

One night, the three of them were in Hugh Akston’s back yard. It was November, and there was a small fire pit with a cheery blaze. Akston was away with some family obligation concerning Thanksgiving, which meant nothing to his students.

Ragnar said, “John, Francisco and I are getting worried about you.

John: “Yes?”

Francisco: “You seem to be thinking too much about this girl you once knew.”

John: “You’ve been investigating me.”

Ragnar shifted uneasily. “We’ve been investigating her.”

Francisco: “We can’t understand your interest in her. She’s clearly a dirty slut.”

It was the way they spoke to each other. Any woman who didn’t embody their ideals was a dirty slut, as did any man who would fuck a woman “beneath” him in the capitalist ranking system was also a dirty slut. Only people who fucked as they choose to fuck were doing it right. And, to be honest, they made considerable exception for Ragnar’s tastes, which had less to do with ideology and more to do with movie-star good looks.

John stood up and started to pace back and forth in front of the fire. He wore a thunderbolt and kept making fists. He said, “You don’t know what you’re talking about. She’s a highly intelligent and driven woman. Do you think she got into medical school here by chance?”

Ragnar and Francisco struggled with that. They believed they were driven by reason alone. A reasonable person would think as they thought, at least a little. Despite Nancy’s obvious intelligence, she could not be intelligent because she disagreed with everything they stood for.

Ragnar laughed. “Then you must see more in her than I do!”

John looked like he was about to hit Ragnar, which was ridiculous, because Ragnar would tear him apart. Francisco stood up between them.

Francisco was conciliatory: “We are friends, here. Ragnar mere said what I was thinking, too. You see something in her that we have missed.”

John's eyes were fixed ahead, past both of his friends, not seeing either. "Yes," John said. "I have."

Ragnar's blood was still up. He said, "Prove it."

John nodded. "I will."

XI.

Nancy was studying in the library when John approached her. He chose the spot because it seemed unlikely that Nancy would make a scene, there, and because it was public enough that she would not feel especially threatened.

She was bent over a notepad, a book open next to it, and she tapped her pencil against the tablet. She did not notice John until he cleared his throat. Nancy looked up, and her breath caught as she recognized him.

She said, "I didn't know you went to this school."

John: "I'm a senior, but I generally do graduate studies. I find undergraduate work to be tedious."

"You always were clever. No, you were always intelligent."

"Can I sit?"

She pursed her lips. Then nodded. "Yes, I suppose so. We aren't children, anymore, are we?"

John kept his face rigid. He didn't like thinking about the time in the ice cream parlor – not because he thought he did anything wrong, but because the rejection still haunted him.

Nancy sat back. "You have grown quite a lot."

John recognized it as meaningless small talk. He didn't like small talk. He said, "I have thought about you a great deal."

"I have practiced not thinking about you at all."

John controlled his temper. Nancy smiled, but it was cutting. He wondered why people did not pursue joy, why they took pleasure in cruelty.

Nancy said, an amused lilt to her voice, "What is it that you want, John? You're clearly not here to apologize. Do you even understand why you should apologize?"

"My friends and I have come up with a complete system of philosophy that will appeal to anyone who is honest and reasonable. It's based on Aristotle."

"I haven't picked up a philosophy book in a dog's year, and I suspect it'll be a few years yet before I return to it. Medical school is fairly absorbing."

Then she looked at him like she wanted him to get to the point.

John: "This is very important."

"Perhaps so. But so is my anatomy test. I have found that one of the benefits of studying medicine is that you can always make an ethical claim to be studying when someone wants you to do something else."

"Part of our philosophy is that one needs to enact your ethics in all areas of life."

"It sounds exhausting. It would be very hard to be philosophical in your sleep, and I have yet to take a philosophical shower."

"This isn't a joke."

She sighed. "I suppose not. I can't remember you ever telling a joke. John, I am living my ethics. I'm studying to be a doctor. I want to help women get the medical care that is so often denied to them due to the biases in the medical profession that treat women's problems like an appendix to the male anatomy."

"That's not as important as the real ethical basis of all professions, which is the transfer of money for services as according to their mutual value to the participants."

"What?" Nancy was slightly surprised.

"That the only free humans treat all transactions like a mercantile exchange, each seeking their maximum advantage. The basis of all human freedom is the exchange of money between rational beings pursuing selfish interests."

"I . . . that's the most horrible things I've heard in person."

John's heart was sinking fast. "I'm not explaining it well."

"No, lack of eloquence was never a problem you've had, John. You're suggesting that I, as a physician, should sell my services to the highest bidder in the selfish pursuit of money."

That was exactly what John said, of course. He looked at Nancy, right in the eye, because he knew that people often shied away from his gaze. Nancy didn't look away. If anything, she squared her shoulders and looked at him as if to dare him to do something.

John couldn't bear the thought of defeat. He clenched his teeth. She *would* listen to him.

She wouldn't. She went back to her book. "Anatomy tests won't finish themselves," she said. "It was good seeing you, John. You take care of yourself."

Then he sat there with his guts cold, knowing he had been dismissed. He. Had. Been. Dismissed.

He wanted to grab her, shake her, hit her. He wanted to kill her. He didn't. He got up and left, looking over his shoulder as he went. Nancy ignored him altogether, like he didn't exist.

XII.

John got Francisco and Ragnar together at Hugh Akston's place. John paced back and forth. He had wild eyes, and his hands fidgeted constantly. He was flushed and he saw past all material objects. Neither Francisco nor Ragnar had seen him this way, before. He frightened them with his intensity, and they were intense men, too. There was an aura of violence around John Galt, like he had gone to a faraway land and come back with secrets of death. John burned with a bright, hot, white light.

He said, "We have not gone far enough. A is A. If one has followed the logic from absolute principles, then it becomes axiomatic that moral people behave in moral ways. Adherence to the logic that flows unstoppably from first principles is true in all places, all times, all situations. Truth unrolls until it encompasses the world. It encompasses everything, and it must encompass everything, or else is cannot be true. Absolute principles are precisely that: absolute. A is A.

"We have seriously underestimated our enemies, my friends. When mystics are confronted with the truth coming from a free man, they will hurt him, and when they injure a free man they will demand forgiveness."

Francisco: "Did you misspeak?"

John: "No. After they injure a free man, the mystics will demand an apology. In a like manner, when a mystic receives charity, they enslave the producer. Whatever wounds we take, they will not only

deliver them with greater intensity, but demand that we apology for being hurt. They will invert all the logic and values we possess. While we long for life and joy, they strive for death and pain.”

Francisco hesitated, then nodded his head. “Yes, I see what you’re saying.”

Ragnar followed John’s words, mouthing the word “yes” again and again.

John’s eyes focused, drawing him away from his faraway place, looking at Francisco and Ragnar. Both of his friends were leaning forward in their seats, their mouths were slightly open, as if they were about to kiss someone. They, too, were flushed with the passion that came from John. It was true and right, and he laughed, because he knew that they would do whatever he asked of them. He recognized the look. It was the same as the look on the faces of the people in his grandfather’s congregation.

Francisco said, “I must introduce you to Dagny, soon.”