CHAPTER I
ATLANTIS

When she opened her eyes, she saw sunlight, green leaves and a man's face. She thought: I know what this is. This was the world as she had expected to see it at sixteen—and now she had reached it—and it seemed so simple, so unastonishing, that the thing she felt was like a blessing pronounced upon the universe by means of three words: But of course.

She was looking up at the face of a man who knelt by her side, and she knew that in all the years behind her, this was what she would have given her life to see: a face that bore no mark of pain or fear or guilt. The shape of his mouth was pride, and more: it was as if he took pride in being proud. The angular planes of his cheeks made her think of arrogance, of tension, of scorn—yet the face had none of these qualities, it had their final sum: a look of serene determination and of certainty, and the look of a ruthless innocence which would not seek forgiveness or grant it. It was a face that had nothing to hide or to escape, a face with no fear of being seen, or of seeing, so that the first thing she grasped about him was the intense perceptiveness of his eyes—he looked as if his faculty of sight were his best-loved tool and its exercise were a limitless, joyous adventure, as if his eyes imparted a superlative value to himself and to the world—to himself for his ability to see, to the world for being a place so eagerly worth seeing. It seemed to her for a moment that she was in the presence of a being who was pure consciousness—yet she had never been so aware of a man's body. The light cloth of his shirt seemed to stress, rather than hide, the structure of his figure, his skin was suntanned, his body had the hardness, the gaunt, tensile strength, the clean precision of a foundry casting, he looked as if he were poured out of metal, but some dimmed, soft-lustered metal, like an aluminum-copper alloy, the color of his skin blending with the chestnut-brown of his hair, the loose strands of the hair shading from brown to gold in the sun, and his eyes completing the colors, as the one part of the casting left undimmed and harshly lustrous: his eyes were the deep, dark green of light glinting on metal.

He was looking down at her with the faint trace of a smile, it was not a look of discovery, but of familiar contemplation—as if he, too, were seeing the long-expected and the never-doubted.

This was her world, she thought, this was the way men were meant to be and to face their existence—and all the rest of it, all the years of ugliness and struggle were only someone's senseless joke. She smiled at him, as at a fellow conspirator, in relief, in deliverance, in radiant mockery of all the things she would never have to consider important again. He smiled in answer, it was the same smile as her own, as if he felt what she felt and knew what she meant.

"We never had to take any of it seriously, did we?" she whispered.

"No, we never had to."

And then, her consciousness returning fully, she realized that this man was a total stranger.

She tried to draw away from him, but it was only a faint movement of her head on the grass she felt under her hair. She tried to rise.

A shot of pain across her back threw her down again.

"Don't move, Miss Taggart. You're hurt."

"You know me?" Her voice was impersonal and hard.

"I've known you for many years."

"Have I known you?"

"Yes, I think so."

"What is your name?"

"John Galt."
She looked at him, not moving.
"Why are you frightened?" he asked.
"Because I believe it."
He smiled, as if grasping a full confession of the meaning she attached to his name; the smile held an adversary's acceptance of a challenge—and an adult's amusement at the self-deception of a child.
She felt as if she were returning to consciousness after a crash that had shattered more than an airplane. She could not reassemble the pieces now, she could not recall the things she had known about his name, she knew only that it stood for a dark vacuum which she would slowly have to fill. She could not do it now, this man was too blinding a presence, like a spotlight that would not let her see the shapes strewn hi the outer darkness.
"Was it you that I was following?" she asked.
"Yes."
She glanced slowly around her. She was lying in the grass of a field at the foot of a granite drop that came down from thousands of feet away in the blue sky. On the other edge of the field, some crags and pines and the glittering leaves of birch trees hid the space that stretched to a distant wall of encircling mountains. Her plane was not shattered—
it was there, a few feet away, flat on its belly in the grass. There was no other plane in sight, no structures, no sign of human habitation.
"What is this valley?" she asked.
He smiled, "The Taggart Terminal."
"What do you mean?"
"You'll find out."
A dim impulse, like the recoil of an antagonist, made her want to check on what strength was left to her. She could move her arms and legs; she could lift her head; she felt a stabbing pain when she breathed deeply; she saw a thin thread of blood running down her stocking.
"Can one get out of this place?" she asked.
His voice seemed earnest, but the glint of the metal-green eyes was a smile: "Actually—no. Temporarily—yes."
She made a movement to rise. He bent to lift her, but she gathered her strength in a swift, sudden jolt and slipped out of his grasp, struggling to stand up. "I think I can—" she started saying, and collapsed against him the instant her feet rested on the ground, a stab of pain shooting up from an ankle that would not hold her.
He lifted her in his arms and smiled. "No, you can't, Miss Taggart,"
he said, and started off across the field.
She lay still, her arms about him, her head on his shoulder, and she thought: For just a few moments—while this lasts—it is all right to surrender completely—to forget everything and just permit yourself to feel. . . . When had she experienced it before?—she wondered; there had been a moment when these had been the words in her mind, but she could not remember it now. She had known it, once—this feeling of certainty, of the final, the reached, the not-to-be-questioned. But it was new to feel protected, and to feel that it was right to accept the protection, to surrender—right, because this peculiar sense of safety was not protection against the future, but against the past, not the protection of being spared from battle, but of having won it, not a protection granted to her weakness, but to her strength. . . . Aware with abnormal intensity of the pressure of his hands against her body, of the gold and copper threads of his hair, the shadows of his lashes on the skin of his face a few inches away from hers, she wondered dimly: Protected, from what? . . . it's he who was the enemy . . . was he?

. . . why? . . . She did not know, she could not think of it now. It took an effort to remember that she had had a goal and a motive a few hours ago. She forced herself to recapture it.

"Did you know that I was following you?" she asked.

"No."

"Where is your plane?"

"At the landing field."

"Where is the landing field?"

"On the other side of the valley."

"There was no landing field in this valley, when I looked down, There was no meadow, either. How did it get here?"

He glanced at the sky. "Look carefully. Do you see anything up there?"

She dropped her head back, looking straight into the sky, seeing nothing but the peaceful blue of morning. After a while she distinguished a few faint strips of shimmering air.

"Heat waves," she said.

"Refractor rays," he answered. "The valley bottom that you saw is a mountain top eight thousand feet high, five miles away from here."

"A . . . what?"

"A mountain top that no flyer would ever choose for a landing.

What you saw was its reflection projected over this valley."

"How?"

"By the same method as a mirage on a desert: an image refracted from a layer of heated air."

"How?"

"By a screen of rays calculated against everything—except a courage such as yours."

"What do you mean?"

"I never thought that any plane would attempt to drop within seven hundred feet of the ground. You hit the ray screen. Some of the rays are the kind that kill magnetic motors. Well, that's the second time you beat me: I've never been followed, either,"

"Why do you keep that screen?"

"Because this place is private property intended to remain as such."

"What is this place?"

"I'll show it to you, now that you're here, Miss Taggart. I'll answer questions after you've seen it."

She remained silent. She noticed that she had asked questions about every subject, but not about him. It was as if he were a single whole, grasped by her first glance at him, like some irreducible absolute, like an axiom not to be explained any further, as if she knew everything about him by direct perception, and what awaited her now was only the process of identifying her knowledge.

He was carrying her down a narrow trail that went winding to the bottom of the valley. On the slopes around them, the tall, dark pyramids of firs stood immovably straight, in masculine simplicity, like sculpture reduced to an essential form, and they clashed with the complex, feminine, over detailed lace-work of the birch leaves trembling in the sun.

The leaves let the sunrays fall through to sweep across his hair, across both their faces. She could not see what lay below, beyond the turns of the trail.

Her eyes kept coming back to his face. He glanced down at her once in a while. At first, she looked away, as if she had been caught.

Then, as if learning it from him, she held his glance whenever he chose to look down—knowing that he knew what she felt and that he did not hide from her the meaning of his glance.

She knew that his silence was the same confession as her own. He did not hold her in the impersonal manner of a man carrying a wounded woman. It was an embrace, even though she felt no suggestion of it in his bearing; she felt it only by means of her certainty that his whole body was aware of holding hers.

She heard the sound of the waterfall before she saw the fragile thread that fell in broken strips of glitter down the ledges. The sound came through some dim beat in her mind, some faint rhythm that seemed no louder than a struggling memory—but they went past and the beat remained; she listened to the sound of the water, but another sound seemed to grow clearer, rising, not in her mind, but from somewhere among the leaves. The trail turned, and in a sudden clearing she saw a small house on a ledge below, with a flash of sun on the pane of an open window. In the moment when she knew what experience had once made her want to surrender to the immediate present—it had been the night in a dusty coach of the Comet, when she had heard the. theme of Halley's Fifth Concerto for the first time—she knew that she was hearing it now, hearing it rise from the keyboard of a piano, in the clear, sharp chords of someone's powerful, confident touch.

She snapped the question at his face, as if hoping to catch him unprepared: "That's the Fifth Concerto by Richard Halley, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When did he write it?"

"Why don't you ask him that in person?"

"Is he here?"

"It's he who's playing it. That's his house."

"Oh . . . !"

"You'll meet him, later. He'll be glad to speak to you. He knows that his works are the only records you like to play, in the evening, when you are alone."

"How does he know that?"

"I told him."

The look on her face was like a question that would have begun with "How in hell . . . ?"—but she saw the look of his eyes, and she laughed, her laughter giving sound to the meaning of his glance.

She could not question anything, she thought, she could not doubt, not now—not with the sound of that music rising triumphantly through the sun-drenched leaves, the music of release, of deliverance, played as it was intended to be played, as her mind had struggled to hear it in a rocking coach through the beat of wounded wheels—it was this that her mind had seen in the sounds, that night—this valley and the morning sun and—

And then she gasped, because the trail had turned and from the height of an open ledge she saw the town on the floor of the valley.

It was not a town, only a cluster of houses scattered at random from the bottom to the rising steps of the mountains that went on rising above their roofs, enclosing them within an abrupt, impassable circle.

They were homes, small and new, with naked, angular shapes and the glitter of broad windows. Far in the distance, some structures seemed taller, and the faint coils of smoke above them suggested an industrial district. But close before her, rising on a slender granite column from a ledge below to the level of her eyes, blinding her by its glare, dimming the rest, stood a dollar sign three feet tall, made of solid gold. It hung in space above the town, as its coat-of-arms, its trademark, its beacon—

and it caught the sunrays, like some transmitter of energy that sent them in shining blessing to stretch horizontally through the air above the roofs, "What's that?" she gasped, pointing at the sign.

"Oh, that's Francisco's private joke."

"Francisco—who?" she whispered, knowing the answer.

"Francisco d'Anconia."
"Is he here, too?"
"He will be, any day now."
"What do you mean, his joke?"
"He gave that sign as an anniversary present to the owner of this place. And then we all adopted it as our particular emblem. We liked the idea."
"Aren't you the owner of this place?"
"I? No." He glanced down at the foot of the ledge and added, pointing, "There's the owner of this place, coming now."
A car had stopped at the end of a dirt road below, and two men were hurrying up the trail. She could not distinguish their faces; one of them was slender and tall, the other shorter, more muscular. She lost sight of them behind the twists of the trail, as he went on carrying her down to meet them.
She met them when they emerged suddenly from behind a rocky corner a few feet away. The sight of their faces hit her with the abruptness of a collision.
"Well, I'll be goddamned!" said the muscular man, whom she did not know, staring at her.
She was staring at the tall, distinguished figure of his companion: it was Hugh Akston.
It was Hugh Akston who spoke first, bowing to her with a courteous smile of welcome. "Miss Taggart, this is the first time anyone has ever proved me wrong, I didn't know—when I told you you'd never find him —that the next time I saw you, you would be in his arms."
"In whose arms?"
"Why, the inventor of the motor."
She gasped, closing her eyes; this was one connection she knew she should have made. When she opened her eyes, she was looking at Galt, He was smiling, family, derisively, as if he knew fully what this meant to her.
"It would have served you right if you'd broken your neck!" the muscular man snapped at her, with the anger of concern, almost of affection. "What a stunt to pull—for a person who'd have been admitted here so eagerly, if she'd chosen to come through the front door!"
"Miss Taggart, may I present Midas Mulligan?" said Galt.
"Oh," she said weakly, and laughed; she had no capacity for astonishment any longer. "Do you suppose I was killed in that crash—and this is some other kind of existence?"
"It is another kind of existence," said Galt. "But as for being killed, doesn't it seem more like the other way around?"
"Oh yes," she whispered, "yes . . ." She smiled at Mulligan. "Where is the front door?"
"Here," he said, pointing to his forehead.
"I've lost the key," she said simply, without resentment. "I've lost all keys, right now."
"You'll find them. But what in blazes were you doing in that plane?"
"Following."
"Him?" He pointed at Galt.
"Yes."
"You're lucky to be alive! Are you badly hurt?"
"I don't think so."
"You'll have a few questions to answer, after they patch you up." He turned brusquely, leading the way down to the car, then glanced at Galt. "Well, what do we do now? There's something we hadn't provided for: the first scab."
"The first . . . what?" she asked.
"Skip it," said Mulligan, and looked at Galt. "What do we do?"

"It will be my charge," said Galt. "I will be responsible. You take Quentin Daniels."
"Oh, he's no problem at all. He needs nothing but to get acquainted with the place. He seems to know all the rest,"
"Yes. He had practically gone the whole way by himself." He saw her watching him in bewilderment, and said, "There's one thing I must thank you for, Miss Taggart: you did pay me a compliment when you chose Quentin Daniels as my understudy. He was a plausible one."
"Where is he?" she asked. "Will you tell me what happened?"
"Why, Midas met us at the landing field, drove me to my house and took Daniels with him. I was going to join them for breakfast, but I saw your plane spinning and plunging for that pasture. I was the closest one to the scene."
"We got here as fast as we could," said Mulligan. "I thought he deserved to get himself killed—whoever was in that plane. I never dreamed that it was one of the only two persons in the whole world whom I'd exempt."
"Who is the other one?" she asked.
"Hank Rearden."
She winced; it was like a sudden blow from another great distance.
She wondered why it seemed to her that Galt was watching her face intently and that she saw an instant's change in his, too brief to define.
They had come to the car. It was a Hammond convertible, its top down, one of the costliest models, some years old, but kept in the shining trim of efficient handling. Galt placed her cautiously in the back seat and held her in the circle of his arm. She felt a stabbing pain once in a while, but she had no attention to spare for it. She watched the distant houses of the town, as Mulligan pressed the starter and the car moved forward, as they went past the sign of the dollar and a golden ray hit her eyes, sweeping over her forehead.
"Who is the owner of this place?" she asked.
"I am," said Mulligan.
"What is he?" She pointed to Galt.
Mulligan chuckled. "He just works here."
"And you, Dr. Akston?" she asked.
He glanced at Galt, "I'm one of his two fathers, Miss Taggart. The one who didn't betray him."
"Oh!" she said, as another connection fell into place. "Your third pupil?"
"That's right."
"The second assistant bookkeeper!" she moaned suddenly, at one more memory.
"What's that?"
"That's what Dr. Stadler called him. That's what Dr. Stadler told me he thought his third pupil had become."
"He overestimated," said Galt. "I'm much lower than that by the scale of his standards and of his world."
The car had swerved into a lane rising toward a lonely house that stood on a ridge above the valley. She saw a man walking down a path, ahead of them, hastening in the direction of the town. He wore blue denim overalls and carried a lunchbox. There was something faintly familiar in the swift abruptness of his Galt. As the car went past him, she caught a glimpse of his face—and she jerked backward, her voice rising to a scream from the pain of the movement and from the shock of the sight: "Oh, stop! Stop! Don't let him go!" It was Ellis Wyatt.
The three men laughed, but Mulligan stopped the car. "Oh . . . "
she said weakly, in apology, realizing she had forgotten that this was the place from which Wyatt would not vanish.

Wyatt was running toward them: he had recognized her, too. When he seized the edge of the car, to brake his speed, she saw the face and the young, triumphant smile that she had seen but once before: on the platform of Wyatt Junction.

"Dagny! You, too, at last? One of us?"

"No," said Galt. "Miss Taggart is a castaway."

"What?"

"Miss Taggart's plane crashed. Didn't you see it?"

"Crashed—here?"

"Yes."

"I heard a plane, but I . . ." His look of bewilderment changed to a smile, regretful, amused and friendly. "I see. Oh, hell, Dagny, it's preposterous!"

She was staring at him helplessly, unable to reconnect the past to the present. And helplessly—as one would say to a dead friend, in a dream, the words one regrets having missed the chance to say in life—

she said, with the memory of a telephone ringing, unanswered, almost two years ago, the words she had hoped to say if she ever caught sight of him again, "I . . . I tried to reach you."

He smiled gently. "We've been trying to reach you ever since, Dagny.

. . . I'll see you tonight. Don't worry, I won't vanish—and I don't think you will, either."

He waved to the others and went off, swinging his lunchbox. She glanced up, as Mulligan started the car, and saw Galt's eyes watching her attentively. Her face hardened, as if in open admission of pain and in defiance of the satisfaction it might give him. "All right," she said. "I see what sort of show you want to put me through the shock of witnessing."

But there was neither cruelty nor pity in his face, only the level look of justice. "Our first rule here, Miss Taggart," he answered, "is that one must always see for oneself."

The car stopped in front of the lonely house. It was built of rough granite blocks, with a sheet of glass for most of its front wall. "I'll send the doctor over," said Mulligan, driving off, while Galt carried her up the path.

"Your house?" she asked.

"Mine," he answered, kicking the door open.

He carried her across the threshold into the glistening space of his living room, where shafts of sunlight hit walls of polished pine. She saw a few pieces of furniture made by hand, a ceiling of bare rafters, an archway open upon a small kitchen with rough shelves, a bare wooden table and the astonishing sight of chromium glittering on an electric stove; the place had the primitive simplicity of a frontiersman's cabin, reduced to essential necessities, but reduced with a super-modern skill.

He carried her across the sunrays into a small guest room and placed her down on a bed. She noticed a window open upon a long slant of rocky steps and pines going off into the sky. She noticed small streaks that looked like inscriptions cut into the wood of the walls, a few scattered lines that seemed made by different handwritings; she could not distinguish the words. She noticed another door, left half-open; it led to his bedroom.

"Am I a guest here or a prisoner?" she asked.

"The choice will be yours, Miss Taggart."

"I can make no choice when I'm dealing with a stranger."

"But you're not Didn't you name a railroad line after me?"

"Oh! . . . Yes . . ." It was the small jolt of another connection falling into place. "Yes, I—" She was looking at the tall figure with the sun-streaked hair, with the suppressed smile in the mercilessly perceptive eyes—she was seeing the struggle to build her Line and the summer day of the first

train's run—she was thinking that if a human figure could be fashioned as an emblem of that Line, this was the figure.

"Yes . . . I did . . . " Then, remembering the rest, she added, "But I named it after an enemy."

He smiled. "That's the contradiction you had to resolve sooner or later, Miss Taggart."

"It was you . . . wasn't it? . . . who destroyed my Line. . . ."

"Why, no. It was the contradiction."

She closed her eyes; in a moment, she asked, "All those stories I heard about you—which of them were true?"

"All of them."

"Was it you who spread them?"

"No. What for? I never had any wish to be talked about."

"But you do know that you've become a legend?"

"Yes."

"The young inventor of the Twentieth Century Motor Company is the one real version of the legend, isn't it?"

"The one that's concretely real—yes."

She could not say it indifferently; there was still a breathless tone and the drop of her voice toward a whisper, when she asked, "The motor . . . the motor I found . . . it was you who made it?"

"Yes."

She could not prevent the jolt of eagerness that threw her head up.

"The secret of transforming energy—" she began, and stopped, "I could tell it to you in fifteen minutes," he said, in answer to the desperate plea she had not uttered, "but there's no power on earth that can force me to tell it. If you understand this, you'll understand everything that's baffling you."

"That night . . . twelve years ago . . . a spring night when you walked out of a meeting of six thousand murderers—that story is true, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"You told them that you would stop the motor of the world."

"I have."

"What have you done?"

"I've done nothing, Miss Taggart. And that's the whole of my secret."

She looked at him silently for a long moment. He stood waiting, as if he could read her thoughts. "The destroyer—" she said in a tone of wonder and helplessness.

"—the most evil creature that's ever existed," he said in the tone of a quotation, and she recognized her own words, "the man who's draining the brains of the world."

"How thoroughly have you been watching me," she asked, "and for how long?"

It was only an instant's pause, his eyes did not move, but it seemed to her that his glance was stressed, as if in special awareness of seeing her, and she caught the sound of some particular intensity in his voice as he answered quietly, "For years."

She closed her eyes, relaxing and giving up. She felt an odd, lighthearted indifference, as if she suddenly wanted nothing but the comfort of surrendering to helplessness.

The doctor who arrived was a gray-haired man with a mild, thoughtful face and a firmly, unobtrusively confident manner.

"Miss Taggart, may I present Dr. Hendricks?" said Galt.

"Not Dr, Thomas Hendricks?" she gasped, with the involuntary rudeness of a child; the name belonged to a great surgeon, who had retired and vanished six years ago.

"Yes, of course," said Galt.

Dr. Hendricks smiled at her, in answer. "Midas told me that Miss Taggart has to be treated for shock," he said, "not for the one sustained, but for the ones to come."

"I'll leave you to do it," said Galt, "while I go to the market to get supplies for breakfast."

She watched the rapid efficiency of Dr. Hendricks' work, as he examined her injuries. He had brought an object she had never seen before: a portable X-ray machine. She learned that she had torn the cartilage of two ribs, that she had sprained an ankle, ripped patches of skin off one knee and one elbow, and acquired a few bruises spread in purple blotches over her body. By the time Dr. Hendricks' swift, competent hands had wound the bandages and the tight lacings of tape, she felt as if her body were an engine checked by an expert mechanic, and no further care was necessary, "I would advise you to remain in bed, Miss Taggart."

"Oh no! If I'm careful and move slowly, I'll be all right."

"You ought to rest."

"Do you think I can?"

He smiled. "I guess not."

She was dressed by the time Galt came back. Dr. Hendricks gave him an account of her condition, adding, "I'll be back to check up, tomorrow."

"Thanks," said Galt. "Send the bill to me."

"Certainly not!" she said indignantly. "I will pay it myself."

The two men glanced at each other, in amusement, as at the boast of a beggar.

"We'll discuss that later," said Galt.

Dr. Hendricks left, and she tried to stand up, limping, catching at the furniture for support. Galt lifted her in his arms, carried her to the kitchen alcove and placed her on a chair by the table set for two.

She noticed that she was hungry, at the sight of the coffee pot boiling on the stove, the two glasses of orange juice, the heavy white pottery dishes sparkling in the sun on the polished table top.

"When did you sleep or eat last?" he asked.

"I don't know . . . I had dinner on the train, with—" She shook her head in helplessly bitter amusement: with the tramp, she thought, with a desperate voice pleading for escape from an avenger who would not pursue or be found—the avenger who sat facing her across the table, drinking a glass of orange juice. "I don't know . . . it seems centuries and continents away."

"How did you happen to be following me?"

"I landed at the Alton airport just as you were taking off. The man there told me that Quentin Daniels had gone with you."

"I remember your plane circling to land. But that was the one and only time when I didn't think of you. I thought you were coming by train."

She asked, looking straight at him, "How do you want me to understand that?"

"What?"

"The one and only time when you didn't think of me."

He held her glance; she saw the faint movement she had noted as typical of him: the movement of his proudly intractable mouth curving into the hint of a smile. "In any way you wish," he answered.

She let a moment pass to underscore her choice by the severity of her face, then asked coldly, in the tone of an enemy's accusation, "You knew that I was coming for Quentin Daniels?"

"Yes."

"You got him first and fast, in order not to let me reach him? In order to beat me—knowing fully what sort of beating that would mean for me?"

"Sure."

It was she who looked away and remained silent. He rose to cook the rest of their breakfast. She watched him as he stood at the stove, toasting bread, frying eggs and bacon. There was an easy, relaxed skill about the way he worked, but it was a skill that belonged to another profession; his hands moved with the rapid precision of an engineer pulling the levers of a control board. She remembered suddenly where she had seen as expert and preposterous a performance.

"Is that what you learned from Dr. Akston?" she asked, pointing at the stove.

"That, among other things."

"Did he teach you to spend your time—your time!—" she could not keep the shudder of indignation out of her voice—"on this sort of work?"

"I've spent time on work of much lesser importance."

When he put her plate before her, she asked, "Where did you get that food? Do they have a grocery store here?"

"The best one in the world. It's run by Lawrence Hammond."

"What?"

"Lawrence Hammond, of Hammond Cars. The bacon is from the farm of Dwight Sanders—of Sanders Aircraft. The eggs and the butter from Judge Narragansett—of the Superior Court of the State of Illinois."

She looked at her plate, bitterly, almost as if she were afraid to touch it. "It's the most expensive breakfast I'll ever eat, considering the value of the cook's time and of all those others."

"Yes—from one aspect. But from another, it's the cheapest breakfast you'll ever eat—because no part of it has gone to feed the looters who'll make you pay for it through year after year and leave you to starve in the end."

After a long silence, she asked simply, almost wistfully, "What is it that you're all doing here?"

"Living."

She had never heard that word sound so real, "What is your job?" she asked. "Midas Mulligan said that you work here."

"I'm the handy man, I guess."

"The what?"

"I'm on call whenever anything goes wrong with any of the installations—with the power system, for instance."

She looked at him—and suddenly she tore forward, staring at the electric stove, but fell back on her chair, stopped by pain.

He chuckled. "Yes, that's true—but take it easy or Dr. Hendricks will order you back to bed."

"The power system . . ." she said, choking, "the power system here . . . it's run by means of your motor?"

"Yes."

"It's built? It's working? It's functioning?"

"It has cooked your breakfast."

"I want to see it!"

"Don't bother crippling yourself to look at that stove. It's just a plain electric stove like any other, only about a hundred times cheaper to run.

And that's all you'll have a chance to see, Miss Taggart."

"You promised to show me this valley."

"I'll show it to you. But not the power generator."

"Will you take me to see the place now, as soon as we finish?"

"If you wish—and if you're able to move."

"I am."

He got up, went to the telephone and dialed a number. "Hello, Midas? . . . Yes. . . . He did? Yes, she's all right. . . . Will you rent me your car for the day? . . . Thanks. At the usual rate—

twenty-five cents, ... Can you send it over? . . . Do you happen to have some sort of cane? She'll need it. . . . Tonight? Yes, I think so.
We will. Thanks."
He hung up. She was staring at him incredulously.
"Did I understand you to say that Mr. Mulligan—who's worth about two hundred million dollars, I believe—is going to charge you
twenty-five cents for the use of his car?"
"That's right."
"Good heavens, couldn't he give it to you as a courtesy?"
He sat looking at her for a moment, studying her face, as if deliberately letting her see the amusement in his. "Miss Taggart," he said, "we have no laws in this valley, no rules, no formal organization of any kind. We come here because we want to rest. But we have certain customs, which we all observe, because they pertain to the things we need to rest from. So I'll warn you now that there is one word which is forbidden in this valley: the word 'give,' "
"I'm sorry," she said. "You're right."
He refilled her cup of coffee and extended a package of cigarettes.
She smiled, as she took a cigarette: it bore the sign of the dollar.
"If you're not too tired by evening," he said, "Mulligan has invited us for dinner. He'll have some guests there whom, I think, you'll want to meet."
"Oh, of course! I won't be too tired. I don't think I'll ever feel tired again."
They were finishing breakfast when she saw Mulligan's car stopping in front of the house. The driver leaped out, raced up the path and rushed into the room, not pausing to ring or knock. It took her a moment to realize that the eager, breathless, disheveled young man was Quentin Daniels.
"Miss Taggart," he gasped, "I'm sorry!" The desperate guilt in his voice clashed with the joyous excitement in his face, "I've never broken my word before! There's no excuse for it, I can't ask you to forgive me, and I know that you won't believe it, but the truth is that I—
I forgot!"
She glanced at Galt, "I believe you."
"I forgot that I promised to wait, I forgot everything—until a few minutes ago, when Mr. Mulligan told me that you'd crashed here in a plane, and then I knew it was my fault, and if anything had happened to you—oh God, are you all right?"
"Yes. Don't worry. Sit down."
"I don't know how one can forget one's word of honor. I don't know what happened to me."
"I do."
"Miss Taggart, I had been working on it for months, on that one particular hypothesis, and the more I worked, the more hopeless it seemed to become. I'd been in my laboratory for the last two days, trying to solve a mathematical equation that looked impossible. I felt I'd die at that blackboard, but wouldn't give up. It was late at night when he came in. I don't think I even noticed him, not really. He said he wanted to speak to me and I asked him to wait and went right on.
I think I forgot his presence. I don't know how long he stood there, watching me, but what I remember is that suddenly his hand reached over, swept all my figures off the blackboard and wrote one brief equation. And then I noticed him! Then I screamed—because it wasn't the full answer to the motor, but it was the way to it, a way I hadn't seen, hadn't suspected, but I knew where it led! I remember I cried, 'How could you know it?'—and he answered, pointing at a photograph of your motor, 'I'm the man who made it in the first place.' And that's the last I remember, Miss Taggart—I mean, the

last I remember of my own existence, because after that we talked about static electricity and the conversion of energy and the motor."

"We talked physics all the way down here," said Galt.

"Oh, I remember when you asked me whether I'd go with you," said Daniels, "whether I'd be willing to go and never come back and give up everything . . . Everything? Give up a dead Institute that's crumbling back into the jungle, give up my future as a janitor-slave-by-law, give up Wesley Mouch and Directive 10-289 and sub-animal creatures who crawl on their bellies, grunting that there is no mind! . . . Miss Taggart"—he laughed exultantly—"he was asking me whether I'd give that up to go with him! He had to ask it twice, I couldn't believe it at first, I couldn't believe that any human being would need to be asked or would think of it as a choice. To go? I would have leaped off a skyscraper just to follow him—and to hear his formula before we hit the pavement!"

"I don't blame you," she said; she looked at him with a tinge of wistfulness that was almost envy. "Besides, you've fulfilled your contract. You've led me to the secret of the motor."

"I'm going to be a janitor here, too," said Daniels, grinning happily.

"Mr. Mulligan said he'd give me the job of janitor—at the power plant.

And when I learn, I'll rise to electrician. Isn't he great—Midas Mulligan? That's what I want to be when I reach his age. I want to make money. I want to make millions. I want to make as much as he did!"

"Daniels!" She laughed, remembering the quiet self-control, the strict precision, the stern logic of the young scientist she had known. "What's the matter with you? Where are you? Do you know what you're saying?"

"I'm here, Miss Taggart—and there's no limit to what's possible here!

I'm going to be the greatest electrician in the world and the richest! I'm going to—"

"You're going to go back to Mulligan's house," said Galt, "and sleep for twenty-four hours—or I won't let you near the power plant."

"Yes, sir," said Daniels meekly.

The sun had trickled down the peaks and drawn a circle of shining granite and glittering snow to enclose the valley—when they stepped out of the house. She felt suddenly as if nothing existed beyond that circle, and she wondered at the joyous, proud comfort to be found in a sense of the finite, in the knowledge that the field of one's concern lay within the realm of one's sight. She wanted to stretch out her arms over the roofs of the town below, feeling that her fingertips would touch the peaks across. But she could not raise her arms; leaning on a cane with one hand and on Galt's arm with the other, moving her feet by a slow, conscientious effort, she walked down to the car like a child learning to walk for the first time.

She sat by Galt's side as he drove, skirting the town, to Midas Mulligan's house. It stood on a ridge, the largest house of the valley, the only one built two stories high, an odd combination of fortress and pleasure resort, with stout granite walls and broad, open terraces. He stopped to let Daniels off, then drove on up a winding road rising slowly into the mountains.

It was the thought of Mulligan's wealth, the luxurious car and the sight of Galt's hands on the wheel that made her wonder for the first time whether Galt, too, was wealthy. She glanced at his clothes: the gray slacks and white shirt seemed of a quality intended for long wear; the leather of the narrow belt about his waistline was cracked; the watch on his wrist was a precision instrument, but made of plain stainless steel. The sole suggestion of luxury was the color of his hair—the strands stirring in the wind like liquid gold and copper.

Abruptly, behind a turn of the road, she saw the green acres of pastures stretching to a distant farmhouse. There were herds of sheep, some horses, the fenced squares of pigpens under the sprawling shapes of wooden barns and,

farther away, a metal hangar of a type that did not belong on a farm, A man in a bright cowboy shirt was hurrying toward them. Galt stopped the car and waved to him, but said nothing in answer to her questioning glance. He let her discover for herself, when the man came closer, that it was Dwight Sanders, "Hello, Miss Taggart," he said, smiling.

She looked silently at his rolled shirt sleeves, at his heavy boots, at the herds of cattle. "So that's all that's left of Sanders Aircraft," she said.

"Why, no. There's that excellent monoplane, my best model, which you flattened up in the foothills."

"Oh, you know about that? Yes, it was one of yours. It was a wonderful ship. But I'm afraid I've damaged it pretty badly."

"You ought to have it fixed."

"I think I've ripped the bottom. Nobody can fix it."

"I can."

These were the words and the tone of confidence that she had not heard for years, this was the manner she had given up expecting—but the start of her smile ended in a bitter chuckle. "How?" she asked. "On a hog farm?"

"Why, no. At Sanders Aircraft."

"Where is it?"

"Where did you think it was? In that building in New Jersey, which Tinky Holloway's cousin bought from my bankrupt successors by means of a government loan and a tax suspension? In that building where he produced six planes that never left the ground and eight that did, but crashed with forty passengers each?"

"Where is it, then?"

"Wherever I am."

He pointed across the road. Glancing down through the tops of the pine trees, she saw the concrete rectangle of an airfield on the bottom of the valley.

"We have a few planes here and it's my job to take care of them,"

he said. "I'm the hog farmer and the airfield attendant. I'm doing quite well at producing ham and bacon, without the men from whom I used to buy it. But those men cannot produce airplanes without me—and, without me, they cannot even produce their ham and bacon,"

"But you—you have not been designing airplanes, either."

"No, I haven't. And I haven't been manufacturing the Diesel engines I once promised you. Since the time I saw you last, I have designed and manufactured just one new tractor. I mean, one—I tooled it by hand—no mass production was necessary. But that tractor has cut an eight-hour workday down to four hours on"—the straight line of his arm, extended to point across the valley, moved like a royal scepter; her eyes followed it and she saw the terraced green of hanging gardens on a distant mountainside—"the chicken and dairy farm of Judge Narragansett"—his arm moved slowly to a long, flat stretch of greenish gold at the foot of a canyon, then to a band of violent green—"in the wheat fields and tobacco patch of Midas Mulligan"—his arm rose to a granite flank striped by glistening tiers of leaves—"in the orchards of Richard Halley."

Her eyes went slowly over the curve his arm had traveled, over and over again, long after the arm had dropped; but she said only, "I see."

"Now do you believe that I can fix your plane?" he asked.

"Yes. But have you seen it?"

"Sure. Midas called two doctors immediately—Hendricks for you, and me for your plane. It can be fixed. But it will be an expensive job."

"How much?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred dollars?" she repeated incredulously; the price seemed much too low.

"In gold, Miss Taggart."
"Oh . . . ! Well, where can I buy the gold?"
"You can't," said Galt.
She jerked her head to face him defiantly. "No?"
"No. Not where you come from. Your laws forbid it."
"Yours don't?"
"No."
"Then sell it to me. Choose your own rate of exchange. Name any sum you want—in my money."
"What money? You're penniless, Miss Taggart."
"What?" It was a word that a Taggart heiress could not ever expect to hear.
"You're penniless in this valley. You own millions of dollars in Taggart Transcontinental stock—but it will not buy one pound of bacon from the Sanders hog farm."
"1 see."
Galt smiled and turned to Sanders. "Go ahead and fix that plane.
Miss Taggart will pay for it eventually."
He pressed the starter and drove on, while she sat stiffly straight, asking no questions.
A stretch of violent turquoise blue split the cliffs ahead, ending the road; it took her a second to realize that it was a lake. The motionless water seemed to condense the blue of the sky and the green of the pine-covered mountains into so brilliantly pure a color that it made the sky look a dimmed pale gray. A streak of boiling foam came from among the pines and went crashing down the rocky steps to vanish in the placid water. A small granite structure stood by the stream.
Galt stopped the car just as a husky man in overalls stepped out to the threshold of the open doorway. It was Dick McNamara, who had once been her best contractor.
"Good day, Miss Taggart!" he said happily. "I'm glad to see that you weren't hurt badly."
She inclined her head in silent greeting—it was like a greeting to the loss and the pain of the past, to a desolate evening and the desperate face of Eddie Willers telling her the news of this man's disappearance—
hurt badly? she thought—I was, but not in the plane crash—on that evening, in an empty office. . . . Aloud, she asked, "What are you doing here? What was it that you betrayed me for, at the worst time possible?"
He smiled, pointing at the stone structure and down at the rocky drop where the tube of a water main went vanishing into the underbrush. "I'm the utilities man," he said. "I take care of the water lines, the power lines and the telephone service."
"Alone?"
"Used to. But we've grown so much in the past year that I've had to hire three men to help me."
"What men? From where?"
"Well, one of them is a professor of economics who couldn't get a job outside, because he taught that you can't consume more than you have produced—one is a professor of history who couldn't get a job because he taught that the inhabitants of slums were not the men who made this country—and one is a professor of psychology who couldn't get a job because he taught that men are capable of thinking."
"They work for you as plumbers and linesmen?"
"You'd be surprised how good they are at it."
"And to whom have they abandoned our colleges?"
"To those who're wanted there." He chuckled, "How long ago was it that I betrayed you, Miss Taggart? Not quite three years ago, wasn't it? it's the

John Galt Line that I refused to build for you. Where is your Line now? But my lines have grown, in that time, from the couple of miles that Mulligan had built when I took over, to hundreds of miles of pipe and wire, all within the space of this valley."

He saw the swift, involuntary look of eagerness on her face, the look of a competent person's appreciation; he smiled, glanced at her companion and said softly, "You know, Miss Taggart, when it comes to the John Galt Line—maybe it's I who've followed it and you who're betraying it."

She glanced at Galt. He was watching her face, but she could read nothing in his.

As they drove on along the edge of the lake, she asked, "You've mapped this route deliberately, haven't you? You're showing me all the men whom"—she stopped, feeling inexplicably reluctant to say it, and said, instead—"whom I have lost?"

"I'm showing you all the men whom I have taken away from you,"

he answered firmly.

This was the root, she thought, of the guiltlessness of his face: he had guessed and named the words she had wanted to spare him, he had rejected a good will that was not based on his values—and in proud certainty of being right, he had made a boast of that which she had intended as an accusation.

Ahead of them, she saw a wooden pier projecting into the water of the lake. A young woman lay stretched on the sun-flooded planks, watching a battery of fishing rods. She glanced up at the sound of the car, then leaped to her feet in a single swift movement, a shade too swift, and ran to the road. She wore slacks, rolled above the knees of her bare legs, she had dark, disheveled hair and large eyes. Galt waved to her.

"Hello, John! When did you get in?" she called.

"This morning," he answered, smiling and driving on.

Dagny jerked her head to look back and saw the glance with which the young woman stood looking after Galt. And even though hopelessness, serenely accepted, was part of the worship in that glance, she experienced a feeling she had never known before: a stab of jealousy.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"Our best fishwife. She provides the fish for Hammond's grocery market."

"What else is she?"

"You've noticed that there's a 'what else' for every one of us here?

She's a writer. The kind of writer who wouldn't be published outside.

She believes that when one deals with words, one deals with the mind."

The car turned into a narrow path, climbing steeply into a wilderness of brush and pine trees. She knew what to expect when she saw a handmade sign nailed to a tree, with an arrow pointing the way: The Buena Esperanza Pass.

It was not a pass, it was a wall of laminated rock with a complex chain of pipes, pumps and valves climbing like a vine up its narrow ledges, but it bore, on its crest, a huge wooden sign—and the proud violence of the letters announcing their message to an impassable tangle of ferns and pine branches, was more characteristic, more familiar than the words: Wyatt Oil.

It was oil that ran in a glittering curve from the mouth of a pipe into a tank at the foot of the wall, as the only confession of the tremendous secret struggle inside the stone, as the unobtrusive purpose of all the intricate machinery—but the machinery did not resemble the installations of an oil derrick, and she knew that she was looking at the unborn secret of the Buena Esperanza Pass, she knew that this was oil drawn out of shale by some method men had considered impossible.

Ellis Wyatt stood on a ridge, watching the glass dial of a gauge imbedded in the rock. He saw the car stopping below, and called, "Hi, Dagny! Be with you in a minute!"

There were two other men working with him: a big, muscular roughneck, at a pump halfway up the wall, and a young boy, by the tank on the ground. The young boy had blond hair and a face with an unusual purity of form. She felt certain that she knew this face, but she could not recall where she had seen it. The boy caught her puzzled glance, grinned and, as if to help her, whistled softly, almost inaudibly the first notes of Halley's Fifth Concerto. It was the young brakeman of the Comet.

She laughed. "It was the Fifth Concerto by Richard Halley, wasn't it?"

"Sure," he answered. "But do you think I'd tell that to a scab?"

"A what?"

"What am I paying you for?" asked Ellis Wyatt, approaching; the boy chuckled, darting back to seize the lever he had abandoned for a moment. "It's Miss Taggart who couldn't fire you, if you loafed on the job. lean."

"That's one of the reasons why I quit the railroad, Miss Taggart," said the boy.

"Did you know that I stole him from you?" said Wyatt. "He used to be your best brakeman and now he's my best grease-monkey, but neither one of us is going to hold him permanently."

"Who is?"

"Richard Halley. Music. He's Halley's best pupil."

She smiled, "I know, this is a place where one employs nothing but aristocrats for the lousiest kinds of jobs."

"They're all aristocrats, that's true," said Wyatt, "because they know that there's no such thing as a lousy job—only lousy men who don't care to do it."

The roughneck was watching them from above, listening with curiosity. She glanced up at him, he looked like a truck driver, so she asked, "What were you outside? A professor of comparative philology, I suppose?"

"No, ma'am," he answered. "I was a truck driver." He added, "But that's not what I wanted to remain."

Ellis Wyatt was looking at the place around them with a kind of youthful pride eager for acknowledgment: it was the pride of a host at a formal reception in a drawing room, and the eagerness of an artist at the opening of his show in a gallery. She smiled and asked, pointing at the machinery, "Shale oil?"

"Uh-huh."

"That's the process which you were working to develop while you were on earth?" She said it involuntarily and she gasped a little at her own words.

He laughed. "While I was in hell—yes. I'm on earth now."

"How much do you produce?"

"Two hundred barrels a day."

A note of sadness came back into her voice: "It's the process by which you once intended to fill five tank-trains a day."

"Dagny," he said earnestly, pointing at his tank, "one gallon of it is worth more than a trainful back there in hell—because this is mine, all of it, every single drop of it, to be spent on nothing but myself." He raised his smudged hand, displaying the greasy stains as a treasure, and a black drop on the tip of his finger flashed like a gem in the sun.

"Mine," he said. "Have you let them beat you into forgetting what that word means, what it feels like? You should give yourself a chance to relearn it."

"You're hidden in a hole in the wilderness," she said bleakly, "and you're producing two hundred barrels of oil, when you could have flooded the world with it."

"What for? To feed the looters?"

"No! To earn the fortune you deserve."

"But I'm richer now than I was in the world. What's wealth but the means of expanding one's life? There's two ways one can do it: either by producing more or by producing it faster. And that's what I'm doing: I'm manufacturing time."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm producing everything I need, I'm working to improve my methods, and every hour I save is an hour added to my life. It used to take me five hours to fill that tank. It now takes three. The two I saved are mine—as pricelessly mine as if I moved my grave two further hours away for every five I've got. It's two hours released from one task, to be invested in another—two more hours in which to work, to grow, to move forward. That's the savings account I'm -hoarding. Is there any sort of safety vault that could protect this account in the outside world?"

"But what space do you have for moving forward? Where's your market?"

He chuckled. "Market? I now work for use, not for profit—my use, not the looters' profit. Only those who add to my life, not those who devour it, are my market. Only those who produce, not those who consume, can ever be anybody's market. I deal with the life-givers, not with the cannibals. If my oil takes less effort to produce, I ask less of the men to whom I trade it for the things I need. I add an extra span of time to their lives with every gallon of my oil that they burn. And since they're men like me, they keep inventing faster ways to make the things they make—so every one of them grants me an added minute, hour or day with the bread I buy from them, with the clothes, the lumber, the metal"—he glanced at Galt—"an added year with every month of electricity I purchase. That's our market and that's how it works for us—but that was not the way it worked in the outer world. Down what drain were they poured out there, our days, our lives and our energy?

Into what bottomless, futureless sewer of the unpaid-for? Here, we trade achievements, not failures—values, not needs. We're free of one another, yet we all grow together. Wealth, Dagny? What greater wealth is there than to own your Me and to spend it on growing?

Every living thing must grow. It can't stand still. It must grow or perish.

Look—" He pointed at a plant fighting upward from under the weight of a rock—a long, gnarled stem, contorted by an unnatural struggle, with drooping, yellow remnants of unformed leaves and a single green shoot thrust upward to the sun with the desperation of a last, spent, inadequate effort. "That's what they're doing to us back there in hell.

Do you see me submitting to it?"

"No," she whispered.

"Do you see him submitting?" He pointed at Galt.

"God, no!"

"Then don't be astonished by anything you see in this valley."

She remained silent when they drove on. Galt said nothing.

On a distant mountainside, in the dense green of a forest, she saw a.

pine tree slanting down suddenly, tracing a curve, like the hand of a clock, then crashing abruptly out of sight. She knew that it was a manmade motion.

"Who's the lumberjack around here?" she asked.

"Ted Nielsen."

The road was relaxing into wider curves and gentler grades, among the softer shapes of hillsides. She saw a rust-brown slope patched by two squares of unmatching green: the dark, dusty green of potato plants, and the pale, greenish-silver of cabbages, A man in a red shirt was riding a small tractor, cutting weeds, "Who's the cabbage tycoon?" she asked.

"Roger Marsh."

She closed her eyes. She thought of the weeds that were climbing up the steps of a closed factory, over its lustrous tile front, a few hundred miles away, beyond the mountains.

The road was descending to the bottom of the valley. She saw the roofs of the town straight below, and the small, shining spot of the dollar sign in the distance at the other end. Galt stopped the car in front of the first structure on a ledge above the roofs, a brick building with a faint tinge of red trembling over its smokestack. It almost shocked her to see so logical a sign as "Stockton Foundry" above its door.

When she walked, leaning on her cane, out of the sunlight into the dank gloom of the building, the shock she felt was part sense of anachronism, part homesickness. This was the industrial East which, in the last few hours, had seemed to be centuries behind her. This was the old, the familiar, the loved sight of reddish billows rising to steel rafters, of sparks shooting in sunbursts from invisible sources, of sudden flames streaking through a black fog, of sand molds glowing with white metal. The fog hid the walls of the structure, dissolving its size—

and for a moment, this was the great, dead foundry at Stockton, Colorado, it was Nielsen Motors . . . it was Rearden Steel.

"Hi, Dagny!"

The smiling face that approached her out of the fog was Andrew Stockton's, and she saw a grimy hand extended to her with a gesture of confident pride, as if it held all of her moment's vision on its palm.

She clasped the hand. "Hello," she said softly, not knowing whether she was greeting the past or the future. Then she shook her head and added, "How come you're not planting potatoes or making shoes around here? You've actually remained in your own profession."

"Oh, Calvin Atwood of the Atwood Light and Power Company of New York City is making the shoes. Besides, my profession is one of the oldest and most immediately needed anywhere. Still, I had to fight for it. I had to ruin a competitor, first."

"What?"

He grinned and pointed to the glass door of a sun-flooded room.

"There's my ruined competitor," he said.

She saw a young man bent over a long table, working on a complex model for the mold of a drill head. He had the slender, powerful hands of a concert pianist and the grim face of a surgeon concentrating on his task.

"He's a sculptor," said Stockton. "When I came here, he and his partner had a sort of combination hand-forge and repair shop. I opened a real foundry, and took all their customers away from them. The boy couldn't do the kind of job I did, it was only a part-time business for him, anyway—sculpture is his real business—so he came to work for me. He's making more money now, in shorter hours, than he used to make in his own foundry. His partner was a chemist, so he went into agriculture and he's produced a chemical fertilizer that's doubled some of the crops around here—did you mention potatoes?—potatoes, in particular."

"Then somebody could put you out of business, too?"

"Sure. Any time. I know one man who could and probably will, when he gets here. But, boy!—I'd work for him as a cinder sweeper. He'd blast through this valley like a rocket. He'd triple everybody's production."

"Who's that?"

"Hank Rearden."

"Yes . . ." she whispered, "Oh yes!"

She wondered what had made her say it with such immediate certainty. She felt, simultaneously, that Hank Rearden's presence in this valley was impossible—and that this was his place, peculiarly his, this was the place of his youth, of his start, and, together, the place he had been seeking all his

life, the land he had struggled to reach, the goal of his tortured battle. . . . It seemed to her that the spirals of flame tinged fog were drawing time into an odd circle—and while a dim thought went floating through her mind like the streamer of an unfollowed sentence: To hold an unchanging youth is to reach, at the end, the vision with which one started—she heard the voice of a tramp in a diner, saying, "John Galt found the fountain of youth which he wanted to bring down to men. Only he never came back . . . because he found that it couldn't be brought down."

A sheaf of sparks went up in the depth of the fog—and she saw the broad back of a foreman whose arm made the sweeping gesture of a signal, directing some invisible task. He jerked his head to snap an order—she caught a glimpse of his profile—and she caught her breath.

Stockton saw it, chuckled and called into the fog: "Hey, Ken! Come here! Here's an old friend of yours!"

She looked at Ken Danagger as he approached them. The great industrialist, whom she had tried so desperately to hold to his desk, was now dressed in smudged overalls.

"Hello, Miss Taggart. I told you we'd soon meet again."

Her head dropped, as if in assent and in greeting, but her hand bore down heavily upon her cane, for a moment, while she stood reliving their last encounter: the tortured hour of waiting, then the gently distant face at the desk and the tinkling of a glass-paneled door closing upon a stranger.

It was so brief a moment that two of the men before her could take it only as a greeting—but it was at Galt that she looked when she raised her head, and she saw him looking at her as if he knew what she felt—she saw him seeing in her face the realization that it was he who had walked out of Danagger's office, that day. His face gave her nothing in answer: it had that look of respectful severity with which a man stands before the fact that the truth is the truth.

"I didn't expect it," she said softly, to Danagger. "I never expected to see you again."

Danagger was watching her as if she were a promising child he had once discovered and was now affectionately amused to watch. "I know," he said. "But why are you so shocked?"

"I . . . oh, it's just that it's preposterous!" She pointed at his clothes.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Is this, then, the end of your road?"

"Hell, no! The beginning."

"What are you aiming at?"

"Mining. Not coal, though. Iron."

"Where?"

He pointed toward the mountains. "Right here. Did you ever know Midas Mulligan to make a bad investment? You'd be surprised what one can find in that stretch of rock, if one knows how to look. That's what I've been doing—looking."

"And if you don't find any iron ore?"

He shrugged. "There's other things to do. I've always been short on time in my life, never on what to use it for."

She glanced at Stockton with curiosity. "Aren't you training a man who could become your most dangerous competitor?"

"That's the only sort of men I like to hire. Dagny, have you lived too long among the looters? Have you come to think that one man's ability is a threat to another?"

"Oh no! But I thought I was almost the only one left who didn't think that."

"Any man who's afraid of hiring the best ability he can find, is a cheat who's in a business where he doesn't belong. To me—the foulest man on earth, more contemptible than a criminal, is the employer who rejects men for being too good. That's what I've always thought and—
say, what are you laughing at?"
She was listening to him with an eager, incredulous smile. "It's so startling to hear," she said, "because it's so right!"
"What else can one think?"
She chuckled softly. "You know, when I was a child, I expected every businessman to think it."
"And since then?"
"Since then, I've learned not to expect it."
"But it's right, isn't it?"
"I've learned not to expect the right."
"But it stands to reason, doesn't it?"
"I've given up expecting reason."
"That's what one must never give up," said Ken Danagger.
They had returned to the car and had started down the last, descending curves of the road, when she glanced at Galt and he turned to her at once, as if he had expected it.
"It was you in Danagger's office that day, wasn't it?" she asked.
"Yes."
"Did you know, then, that I was waiting outside?"
"Yes."
"Did you know what it was like, to wait behind that closed door?"
She could not name the nature of the glance with which he looked at her. It was not pity, because she did not seem to be its object; it was the kind of glance with which one looks at suffering, but it was not her suffering that he seemed to be seeing.
"Oh yes," he answered quietly, almost lightly.
The first shop to rise by the side of the valley's single street was like the sudden sight of an open theater: a frame box without front wall, its stage set in the bright colors of a musical comedy—with red cubes, green circles, gold triangles, which were bins of tomatoes, barrels of lettuce, pyramids of oranges, and a spangled backdrop where the sun hit shelves of metal containers. The name on the marquee said; Hammond Grocery Market. A distinguished man in shirt sleeves, with a stern profile and gray temples, was weighing a chunk of butter for an attractive young woman who stood at the counter, her posture light as a show girl's, the skirt of her cotton dress swelling faintly in the wind, like a dance costume. Dagny smiled involuntarily, even though the man was Lawrence Hammond.
The shops were small one-story structures, and as they moved past her, she caught familiar names on their signs, like headings on the pages of a book riffled by the car's motion: Mulligan General Store—Atwood Leather Goods—Nielsen Lumber—then the sign of the dollar above the door of a small brick factory with the inscription: Mulligan Tobacco Company. "Who's the Company, besides Midas Mulligan?" she asked. "Dr. Akston," he answered.
There were few passers-by, some men, fewer women, and they walked with purposeful swiftness, as if bound on specific errands. One after another, they stopped at the sight of the car, they waved to Galt and they looked at her with the unastonished curiosity of recognition.
"Have I been expected here for a long time?" she asked, "You still are," he answered.
On the edge of the road, she saw a structure made of glass sheets held together by a wooden framework, but for one instant it seemed to her that it was only a frame for the painting of a woman—a tall, fragile woman with pale blond hair and a face of such beauty that it seemed veiled by distance, as if

the artist had been merely able to suggest it, not to make it quite real. In the next instant the woman moved her head—and Dagny realized that there were people at the tables inside the structure, that it was a cafeteria, that the woman stood behind the counter, and that she was Kay Ludlow, the movie star who, once seen, could never be forgotten; the star who had retired and vanished five years ago, to be replaced by girls of indistinguishable names and interchangeable faces. But at the shock of the realization, Dagny thought of the sort of movies that were now being made—and then she felt that the glass cafeteria was a cleaner use for Kay Ludlow's beauty than a role in a picture glorifying the commonplace for possessing no glory.

The building that came next was a small, squat block of rough granite, sturdy, solid, neatly built, the lines of its rectangular bulk as severely precise as the creases of a formal garment—but she saw, like an instant's ghost, the long streak of a skyscraper rising into the coils of Chicago's fog, the skyscraper that had once borne the sign she now saw written in gold letters above a modest pine-wood door: Mulligan Bank.

Galt slowed the car while moving past the bank, as if placing the motion in some special italics.

A small brick structure came next, bearing the sign: Mulligan Mint.

"A mint?" she asked. "What's Mulligan doing with a mint?" Galt reached into his pocket and dropped two small coins into the palm of her hand. They were miniature disks of shining gold, smaller than pennies, the kind that had not been in circulation since the days of Nat Taggart; they bore the head of the Statue of Liberty on one side, the words "United States of America—One Dollar" on the other, but the dates stamped upon them were of the past two years.

"That's the money we use here," he said. "It's minted by Midas Mulligan."

"But . . . on whose authority?"

"That's stated on the coin—on both sides of it."

"What do you use for small change?"

"Mulligan mints that, too, in silver. We don't accept any other currency in this valley. We accept nothing but objective values."

She was studying the coins. "This looks like . . . like something from the first morning in the age of my ancestors."

He pointed at the valley, "Yes, doesn't it?"

She sat looking at the two thin, delicate, almost weightless drops of gold in the palm of her hand, knowing that the whole of the Taggart Transcontinental system had rested upon them, that this had been the keystone supporting all the keystones, all the arches, all the girders of the Taggart track, the Taggart Bridge, the Taggart Building. . . . She shook her head and slipped the coins back into his hand.

"You're not making it easier for me," she said, her voice low.

"I'm making it as hard as possible."

"Why don't you say it? Why don't you tell me all the things you want me to learn?"

The gesture of his arm pointed at the town, at the road behind them.

"What have I been doing?" he asked.

They drove on in silence. After a while, she asked, in the tone of a dryly statistical inquiry, "How much of a fortune has Midas Mulligan amassed in this valley?"

He pointed ahead. "Judge for yourself."

The road was winding through stretches of unleveled soil toward the homes of the valley. The homes were not lined along a street, they were spread at irregular intervals over the rises and hollows of the ground, they were small and simple, built of local materials, mostly of granite and pine, with a prodigal ingenuity of thought and a tight economy of physical effort. Every house looked as if it had been put up by the labor of one man, no two houses

were alike, and the only quality they had in common was the stamp of a mind grasping a problem and solving it. Galt pointed out a house, once in a while, choosing the names she knew—and it sounded to her like a list of quotations from the richest stock exchange in the world, or like a roll call of honor: "Ken Danagger . . . Ted Nielsen . . . Lawrence Hammond . . . Roger Marsh . . . Ellis Wyatt . . . Owen Kellogg . . . Dr. Akston."

The home of Dr. Akston was the last, a small cottage with a large terrace, lifted on the crest of a wave against the rising walls of the mountains. The road went past it and climbed on into the coils of an ascending grade. The pavement shrank to a narrow path between two walls of ancient pines, their tall, straight trunks pressing against it like a grim colonnade, their branches meeting above, swallowing the path into sudden silence and twilight. There were no marks of wheels on the thin strip of earth, it looked unused and forgotten, a few minutes and a few turns seemed to take the car miles away from human habitation—

and then there was nothing to break the pressure of the stillness but a rare wedge of sunlight cutting across the trunks in the depth of the forest once in a while.

The sudden sight of a house on the edge of the path struck her like the shock of an unexpected sound: built in loneliness, cut off from all ties to human existence, it looked like the secret retreat of some great defiance or sorrow. It was the humblest home of the valley, a log cabin beaten in dark streaks by the tears of many rains, only its great windows withstanding the storms with the smooth, shining, untouched serenity of glass.

"Whose house is . . . Oh!"—she caught her breath and jerked her head away. Above the door, hit by a ray of sun, its design blurred and worn, battered smooth by the winds of centuries, hung the silver coat of-arms of Sebastian d'Anconia.

As if in deliberate answer to her involuntary movement of escape, Galt stopped the car in front of the house. For a moment, they held each other's eyes: her glance was a question, his a command, her face had a defiant frankness, his an unrevealing severity; she understood his purpose, but not his motive. She obeyed. Leaning on her cane, she stepped out of the car, then stood erect, facing the house.

She looked at the silver crest that had come from a marble palace in Spain to a shack in the Andes to a log cabin in Colorado—the crest of the men who would not submit. The door of the cabin was locked, the sun did not reach into the glazed darkness beyond the windows, and pine branches hung outstretched above the roof like arms spread in protection, in compassion, in solemn blessing. With no sound but the snap of a twig or the ring of a drop falling somewhere in the forest through long stretches of moments, the silence seemed to hold all the pain that had been hidden here, but never given voice. She stood, listening with a gentle, resigned, unlamenting respect: Let's see who'll do greater honor, you—to Nat Taggart, or I—to Sebastian d'Anconia. . . .

Dagny! Help me to remain. To refuse. Even though he's right! . . .

She turned to look at Galt, knowing that he was the man against whom she had had no help to offer. He sat at the wheel of the car, he had not followed her or moved to assist her, as if he had wanted her to acknowledge the past and had respected the privacy of her lonely salute. She noticed that he still sat as she had left him, his forearm leaning against the wheel at the same angle, the fingers of his hand hanging down in the same sculptured position. His eyes were watching her, but that was all she could read in his face: that he had watched her intently, without moving.

When she was seated beside him once more, he said, "That was the first man I took away from you."

She asked, her face stern, open and quietly defiant, "How much do you know about that?"

"Nothing that he told me in words. Everything that the tone of his voice told me whenever he spoke of you."

She inclined her head. She had caught the sound of suffering in the faintest exaggeration of evenness in his voice.

He pressed the starter, the motor's explosion blasted the story contained in the silence, and they drove on., The path widened a little, streaming toward a pool of sunlight ahead.

She saw a brief glitter of wires among the branches, as they drove out into a clearing. An unobtrusive little structure stood against a hillside, on a rising slant of rocky ground. It was a simple cube of granite, the size of a toolshed, it had no windows, no apertures of any kind, only a door of polished steel and a complex set of wire antennae branching out from the roof. Galt was driving past, leaving it unnoticed, when she asked with a sudden start, "What's that?"

She saw the faint break of his smile. "The powerhouse."

"Oh, stop, please!"

He obeyed, backing the car to the foot of the hillside. It was her first few steps up the rocky incline that stopped her, as if there were no need to move forward, no further place to rise—and she stood as in the moment when she had opened her eyes on the earth of the valley, a moment uniting her beginning to her goal.

She stood looking up at the structure, her consciousness surrendered to a single sight and a single, wordless emotion—but she had always known that an emotion was a sum totaled by an adding machine of the mind, and what she now felt was the instantaneous total of the thoughts she did not have to name, the final sum of a long progression, like a voice telling her by means of a feeling: If she had held onto Ouentin Daniels, with no hope of a chance to use the motor, for the sole sake of knowing that achievement had not died on earth—if, like a weighted diver sinking in an ocean of mediocrity, under the pressure of men with gelatin eyes, rubber voices, spiral-shaped convictions, noncommittal souls and non-committing hands, she had held, as her life line and oxygen tube, the thought of a superlative achievement of the human mind—if, at the sight of the motor's remnant, in a sudden gasp of suffocation, as a last protest from his corruption-eaten lungs, Dr.

Stadler had cried for something, not to look down at, but up to, and this had been the cry, the longing and the fuel of her life—if she had moved, drawn by the hunger of her youth for a sight of clean, hard, radiant competence—then here it was before her, reached and done, the power of an incomparable mind given shape in a net of wires sparkling peacefully under a summer sky, drawing an incalculable power out of space into the secret interior of a small stone hovel.

She thought of this structure, half the size of a boxcar, replacing the power plants of the country, the enormous conglomerations of steel, fuel and effort—she thought of the current flowing from this structure, lifting ounces, pounds, tons of strain from the shoulders of those who would make it or use it, adding hours, days and years of liberated time to their lives, be it an extra moment to lift one's head from one's task and glance at the sunlight, or an extra pack of cigarettes bought with the money saved from one's electric bill, or an hour cut from the workday of every factory using power, or a month's journey through the whole, open width of the world, on a ticket paid for by one day of one's labor, on a train pulled by the power of this motor—with all the energy of that weight, that strain, that time replaced and paid for by the energy of a single mind who had known how to make connections of wire follow the connections of his thought. But she knew that there was no meaning in motors or factories or trains, that their only

meaning was in man's enjoyment of his life, which they served—and that her swelling admiration at the sight of an achievement was for the man from whom it came, for the power and the radiant vision within him which had seen the earth as a place of enjoyment and had known that the work of achieving one's happiness was the purpose, the sanction and the meaning of life.

The door of the structure was a straight, smooth sheet of stainless steel, softly lustrous and bluish in the sun. Above it, cut in the granite, as the only feature of the building's rectangular austerity, there stood an inscription: I SWEAR BY MY LIFE AND MY LOVE OF IT THAT I WILL NEVER LIVE FOR THE SAKE OF ANOTHER

MAN, NOR ASK ANOTHER MAN TO LIVE FOR MINE.

She turned to Galt. He stood beside her; he had followed her, he had known that this salute was his. She was looking at the inventor of the motor, but what she saw was the easy, casual figure of a workman in his natural setting and function—she noted the uncommon lightness of his posture, a weightless way of standing that showed an expert control of the use of his body—a tall body in simple garments: a thin shirt, light slacks, a belt about a slender waistline—and loose hair made to glitter like metal by the current of a sluggish wind. She looked at him as she had looked at his structure.

Then she knew that the first two sentences they had said to each other still hung between them, filling the silence—that everything said since, had been said over the sound of those words, that he had known it, had held it, had not let her forget it. She was suddenly aware that they were alone; it was an awareness that stressed the fact, permitting no further implication, yet holding the full meaning of the unnamed in that special stress. They were alone in a silent forest, at the foot of a structure that looked like an ancient temple—and she knew what rite was the proper form of worship to be offered on an altar of that kind.

She felt a sudden pressure at the base of her throat, her head leaned back a little, no more than to feel the faint shift of a current against her hair, but it was as if she were lying back in space, against the wind, conscious of nothing but his legs and the shape of his mouth. He stood watching her, his face still but for the faint movement of his eyelids drawing narrow as if against too strong a light. It was like the beat of three instants—this was the first—and in the next, she felt a stab of ferocious triumph at the knowledge that his effort and his struggle were harder to endure than hers—and, then he moved his eyes and raised his head to look at the inscription on the temple.

She let him look at it for a moment, almost as an act of condescending mercy to an adversary struggling to refuel his strength, then she asked, with a note of imperious pride in her voice, pointing at the inscription, "What's that?"

"It's the oath that was taken by every person in this valley, but you."

She said, looking at the words, "This has always been my own rule of living."

"I know it."

"But I don't think that yours is the way to practice it."

"Then you'll have to learn which one of us is wrong."

She walked up to the steel door of the structure, with a sudden confidence faintly stressed in the movements of her body, a mere hint of stress, no more than her awareness of the power she held by means of his pain—and she tried, asking no permission, to turn the knob of the door. But the door was locked, and she felt no tremor under the pressure of her hand, as if the lock were poured and sealed to the stone with the solid steel of the sheet.

"Don't try to open that door, Miss Taggart"

He approached her, his steps a shade too slow, as if stressing his knowledge of her awareness of every step. "No amount of physical force will

do it," he said. "Only a thought can open that door. If you tried to break it down by means of the best explosives in the world, the machinery inside would collapse into rubble long before the door would give way. But reach the thought which it requires—and the secret of the motor will be yours, as well as"—it was the first break she had heard in his voice—"as well as any other secret you might wish to know."

He faced her for a moment, as if leaving himself open to her full understanding, then smiled oddly, quietly at some thought of his own, and added, "I'll show you how it's done."

He stepped back. Then, standing still, his face raised to the words carved in the stone, he repeated them slowly, evenly, as if taking that oath once more. There was no emotion in his voice, nothing but the spaced clarity of the sounds he pronounced with full knowledge of their meaning—but she knew that she was witnessing the most solemn moment it would ever be given her to witness, she was seeing a man's naked soul and the cost it had paid to utter these words, she was hearing an echo of the day when he had pronounced that oath for the first time and with full knowledge of the years ahead—she knew what manner of man had stood up to face six thousand others on a dark spring night and why they had been afraid of him, she knew that this was the birth and the core of all the things that had happened to the world in the twelve years since, she knew that this was of far greater import than the motor hidden inside the structure—she knew it, to the sound of a man's voice pronouncing in self-reminder and rededication: "I swear by my life . . . and my love of it . . . that I will never live for the sake of another man . . . nor ask another man . . . to live . . . for mine."

It did not startle her, it seemed unastonishing and almost unimportant, that at the end of the last sound, she saw the door opening slowly, without human touch, moving inward upon a growing strip of darkness.

In the moment when an electric light went on inside the structure, he seized the knob and pulled the door shut, its lock clicking sealed once more.

"It's a sound lock," he said; his face was serene. "That sentence is the combination of sounds needed to open it. I don't mind telling you this secret—because I know that you won't pronounce those words until you mean them the way I intended them to be meant."

She inclined her head. "I won't."

She followed him down to the car, slowly, feeling suddenly too exhausted to move. She fell back against the seat, closing her eyes, barely hearing the sound of the starter. The accumulated strain and shock of her sleepless hours hit her at once, breaking through the barrier of the tension her nerves had held to delay it. She lay still, unable to think, to react or to struggle, drained of all emotions but one.

She did not speak. She did not open her eyes until the car stopped in front of his house.

"You'd better rest," he said, "and go to sleep right now, if you want to attend Mulligan's dinner tonight."

She nodded obediently. She staggered to the house, avoiding his help. She made an effort to tell him, "I'll be all right," then to escape to the safety of her room and last long enough to close the door.

She collapsed, face down, on the bed. It was not the mere fact of physical exhaustion. It was the sudden monomania of a sensation too complete to endure. While the strength of her body was gone, while her mind had lost the faculty of consciousness, a single emotion drew on her remnants of energy, of understanding, of judgment, of control, leaving her nothing to resist it with or to direct it, making her unable to desire, only to feel, reducing her to a mere sensation—a static sensation without start or goal. She kept seeing his figure in her mind—his figure as he had stood at the door of the structure—she felt nothing else, no wish, no hope, no estimate of her feeling, no name

for it, no relation to herself—there was no entity such as herself, she was not a person, only a function, the function of seeing him, and the sight was its own meaning and purpose, with no further end to reach.

Her face buried in the pillow, she recalled dimly, as a faint sensation, the moment of her take-off from the floodlighted strip of the Kansas airfield. She felt the beat of the engine, the streak of accelerating motion gathering power in a straight-line run to a single goal—and in the moment when the wheels left the ground, she was asleep.

The floor of the valley was like a pool still reflecting the glow of the sky, but the light was thickening from gold to copper, the shores were fading and the peaks were smoke-blue—when they drove to Mulligan's house.

There was no trace of exhaustion left in her bearing and no remnant of violence. She had awakened at sundown; stepping out of her room, she had found Galt waiting, sitting idly motionless in the light of a lamp. He had glanced up at her; she had stood in the doorway, her face composed, her hair smooth, her posture relaxed and confident —she had looked as she would have looked on the threshold of her office in the Taggart Building, but for the slight angle of her body leaning on a cane. He had sat looking at her for a moment, and she had wondered why she had felt certain that this was the image he was seeing—he was seeing the doorway of her office, as if it were a sight long-imagined and long-forbidden.

She sat beside him in the car, feeling no desire to speak, knowing that neither of them could conceal the meaning of their silence. She watched a few lights come up in the distant homes of the valley, then the lighted windows of Mulligan's house on the ledge ahead. She asked, "Who will be there?"

"Some of your last friends," he answered, "and some of my first."

Midas Mulligan met them at the door. She noticed that his grim, square face was not as harshly expressionless as she had thought: he had a look of satisfaction, but satisfaction could not soften his features, it merely struck them like flint and sent sparks of humor to glitter faintly in the corners of his eyes, a humor that was shrewder, more demanding, yet warmer than a smile.

He opened the door of his house, moving his arm a shade more slowly than normal, giving an imperceptibly solemn emphasis to his gesture.

Walking into the living room, she faced seven men who rose to their feet at her entrance.

"Gentlemen—Taggart Transcontinental," said Midas Mulligan.

He said it smiling, but only half-jesting; some quality in his voice made the name of the railroad sound as it would have sounded in the days of Nat Taggart, as a sonorous title of honor.

She inclined her head, slowly, in acknowledgment to the men before her, knowing that these were the men whose standards of value and honor were the same as her own, the men who recognized the glory of that title as she recognized it, knowing with a sudden stab of wistfulness how much she had longed for that recognition through all her years.

Her eyes moved slowly, in greeting, from face to face: Ellis Wyatt—

Ken Danagger—Hugh Akston—Dr. Hendricks—Quentin Daniels—

Mulligan's voice pronounced the names of the two others: "Richard Halley—Judge Narragansett."

The faint smile on Richard Halley's face seemed to tell her that they had known each other for years—as, in her lonely evenings by the side of her phonograph, they had. The austerity of Judge Narragansett's white-haired figure reminded her that she had once heard him described as a marble statue—a blindfolded marble statue; it was the kind of figure that had vanished from the courtrooms of the country when the gold coins had vanished from the country's hands.

"You have belonged here for a long time, Miss Taggart," said Midas Mulligan. "This was not the way we expected you to come, but—welcome home."
No!—she wanted to answer, but heard herself answering softly, "Thank you."
"Dagny, how many years is it going to take you to learn to be yourself?" It was Ellis Wyatt, grasping her elbow, leading her to a chair, grinning at her look of helplessness, at the struggle between a smile and a tightening resistance in her face. "Don't pretend that you don't understand us. You do."
"We never make assertions, Miss Taggart," said Hugh Akston. "That is the moral crime peculiar to our enemies. We do not tell—we show.
We do not claim—we prove. It is not your obedience that we seek to win, but your rational conviction. You have seen all the elements of our secret. The conclusion is now yours to draw—we can help you to name it, but not to accept it—the sight, the knowledge and the acceptance must be yours."
"I feel as if I know it," she answered simply, "and more: I feel as if I've always known it, but never found it, and now I'm afraid, not afraid to hear it, just afraid that it's coming so close."
Akston smiled. "What does this look like to you, Miss Taggart?" He pointed around the room.
"This?" She laughed suddenly, looking at the faces of the men against the golden sunburst of rays filling the great windows. "This looks like . . . You know, I never hoped to see any of you again, I wondered at times how much I'd give for just one more glimpse or one more word—and now—now this is like that dream you imagine in childhood, when you think that some day, in heaven, you will see those great departed whom you had not seen on earth, and you choose, from all the past centuries, the great men you would like to meet."
"Well, that's one clue to the nature of our secret," said Akston.
"Ask yourself whether the dream of heaven and greatness should be left waiting for us in our graves—or whether it should be ours here and now and on this earth."
"I know," she whispered.
"And if you met those great men in heaven," asked Ken Danagger, "what would you want to say to them?"
"Just . . . just 'hello,' I guess."
"That's not all," said Danagger. "There's something you'd want to hear from them. I didn't know it, either, until I saw him for the first time"—he pointed to Galt—"and he said it to me, and then I knew what it was that I had missed all my life. Miss Taggart, you'd want them to look at you and to say, 'Well done' " She dropped her head and nodded silently, head down, not to let him see the sudden spurt of tears to her eyes. "All right, then: Well done, Dagny!—well done—too well—and now it's time for you to rest from that burden which none of us should ever have had to carry."
"Shut up," said Midas Mulligan, looking at her bowed head with anxious concern.
But she raised her head, smiling. "Thank you," she said to Danagger.
"If you talk about resting, then let her rest," said Mulligan. "She's had too much for one day."
"No." She smiled. "Go ahead, say it—whatever it is."
"Later," said Mulligan.
It was Mulligan and Akston who served dinner, with Quentin Daniels to help them. They served it on small silver trays, to be placed on the arms of the chairs—and they all sat about the room, with the fire of the sky fading in the windows and sparks of electric light glittering in the wine glasses. There was an air of luxury about the room, but it was the luxury of expert simplicity; she noted the costly furniture, carefully chosen for comfort, bought somewhere at a time when luxury had still been an art. There were no superfluous objects, but she noticed a small canvas by a great master of the Renaissance, worth a fortune, she noticed an Oriental rug of a texture and

color that belonged under glass in a museum. This was Mulligan's concept of wealth, she thought—the wealth of selection, not of accumulation.

Quentin Daniels sat on the floor, with his tray on his lap; he seemed completely at home, and he glanced up at her once in a while, grinning like an impudent kid brother who had beaten her to a secret she had not discovered. He had preceded her into the valley by some ten minutes, she thought, but he was one of them, while she was still a stranger.

Galt sat aside, beyond the circle of lamplight, on the arm of Dr.

Akston's chair. He had not said a word, he had stepped back and turned her over to the others, and he sat watching it as a spectacle in which he had no further part to play. But her eyes kept coming back to him, drawn by the certainty that the spectacle was of his choice and staging, that he had set it in motion long ago, and that all the others knew it as she knew it.

She noticed another person who was intensely aware of Galt's presence: Hugh Akston glanced up at him once in a while, involuntarily, almost surreptitiously, as if struggling not to confess the loneliness of a long separation. Akston did not speak to him, as if taking his presence for granted. But once, when Galt bent forward and a strand of hair fell down across his face, Akston reached over and brushed it back, his hand lingering for an imperceptible instant on his pupil's forehead: it was the only break of emotion he permitted himself, the only greeting; it was the gesture of a father.

She found herself talking to the men around her, relaxing in lighthearted comfort. No, she thought, what she felt was not strain, it was a dim astonishment at the strain which she should, but did not, feel; the abnormality of it was that it seemed so normal and simple.

She was barely aware of her questions, as she spoke to one man after another, but their answers were printing a record in her mind, moving sentence by sentence to a goal.

"The Fifth Concerto?" said Richard Halley, in answer to her question. "I wrote it ten years ago. We call it the Concerto of Deliverance.

Thank you for recognizing it from a few notes whistled in the night.

. . . Yes, I know about that. . . . Yes, since you knew my work, you would know, when you heard it, that this Concerto said everything I had been struggling to say and reach. It's dedicated to him." He pointed to Galt. "Why, no, Miss Taggart, I haven't given up music, What makes you think so? I've written more in the last ten years than in any other period of my life. I will play it for you, any of it, when you come to my house. . . . No, Miss Taggart, it will not be published outside. Not a note of it will be heard beyond these mountains."

"No, Miss Taggart, I have not given up medicine," said Dr. Hendricks, in answer to her question. "I have spent the last six years on research. I have discovered a method to protect the blood vessels of the brain from that fatal rupture which is known as a brain stroke. It will remove from human existence the terrible threat of sudden paralysis.

. . . No, not a word of my method will be heard outside."

"The law, Miss Taggart?" said Judge Narragansett. "What law? I did not give it up—it has ceased to exist. But I am still working in the profession I had chosen, which was that of serving the cause of justice.

. . . No, justice has not ceased to exist. How could it? It is possible for men to abandon their sight of it, and then it is justice that destroys them. But it is not possible for justice to go out of existence, because one is an attribute of the other, because justice is the act of acknowledging that which exists. . . . Yes, I am continuing in my profession. I am writing a treatise on the philosophy of law, I shall demonstrate that humanity's darkest evil, the most destructive horror machine among all the devices of

men, is non-objective law. . . . No, Miss Taggart, my treatise will not be published outside."

"My business, Miss Taggart?" said Midas Mulligan. "My business is blood transfusion—and I'm still doing it. My job is to feed a life-fuel into the plants that are capable of growing. But ask Dr. Hendricks whether any amount of blood will save a body that refuses to function, a rotten hulk that expects to exist without effort. My blood bank is gold. Gold is a fuel that will perform wonders, but no fuel can work where there is no motor. . . . No, I haven't given up. I merely got fed up with the job of running a slaughter house, where one drains blood out of healthy living beings and pumps it into gutless half-corpses."

"Given up?" said Hugh Akston. "Check your premises, Miss Taggart.

None of us has given up. It is the world that has. . . . What is wrong with a philosopher running a roadside diner? Or a cigarette factory, as I am doing now? All work is an act of philosophy. And when men will learn to consider productive work—and that which is its source—as the standard of their moral values, they will reach that state of perfection which is the birthright they lost. . . . The source of work? Man's mind, Miss Taggart, man's reasoning mind. I am writing a book on this subject, defining a moral philosophy that I learned from my own pupil. . . . Yes, it could save the world. . . . No, it will not be published outside."

"Why?" she cried. "Why? What are you doing, all of you?"

"We are on strike," said John Galt.

They all turned to him, as if they had been waiting for his voice and for that word. She heard the empty beat of time within her, which was the sudden silence of the room, as she looked at him across a span of lamplight. He sat slouched casually on the arm of a chair, leaning forward, his forearm across his knees, his hand hanging down idly—

and it was the faint smile on his face that gave to his words the deadly sound of the irrevocable: "Why should this seem so startling? There is only one kind of men who have never been on strike in human history. Every other kind and class have stopped, when they so wished, and have presented demands to the world, claiming to be indispensable—except the men who have carried the world on their shoulders, have kept it alive, have endured torture as sole payment, but have never walked out on the human race.

Well, their turn has come. Let the world discover who they are, what they do and what happens when they refuse to function. This is the strike of the men of the mind, Miss Taggart. This is the mind on strike."

She did not move, except for the fingers of one hand that moved slowly up her cheek to her temple.

"Through all the ages," he said, "the mind has been regarded as evil, and every form of insult: from heretic to materialist to exploiter—

every form of iniquity: from exile to disfranchisement to expropriation—every form of torture: from sneers to rack to firing squad—

have been brought down upon those who assumed the responsibility of looking at the world through the eyes of a living consciousness and performing the crucial act of a rational connection. Yet only to the extent to which—in chains, in dungeons, in hidden corners, in the cells of philosophers, in the shops of traders—some men continued to think, only to that extent was humanity able to survive. Through all the centuries of the worship of the mindless, whatever stagnation humanity chose to endure, whatever brutality to practice—it was only by the grace of the men who perceived that wheat must have water in order to grow, that stones laid in a curve will form an arch, that two and two make four, that love is not served by torture and life is not fed by destruction—only by the grace of those men did the rest of them learn to experience moments when they caught the spark of being human, and only the sum of such moments permitted them to continue

to exist. It was the man of the mind who taught them to bake their bread, to heal their wounds, to forge their weapons and to build the jails into which they threw him. He was the man of extravagant energy—and reckless generosity—who knew that stagnation is not man's fate, that impotence is not his nature, that the ingenuity of his mind is his noblest and most joyous power—and in service to that love of existence he was alone to feel, he went on working, working at any price, working for his despoilers, for his jailers, for his torturers, paying with his life for the privilege of saving theirs. This was his glory and his guilt—that he let them teach him to feel guilty of his glory, to accept the part of a sacrificial animal and, in punishment for the sin of intelligence, to perish on the altars of the brutes. The tragic joke of human history is that on any of the altars men erected, it was always man whom they immolated and the animal whom they enshrined. It was always the animal's attributes, not man's, that humanity worshipped: the idol of instinct and the idol of force—the mystics and the kings—the mystics, who longed for an irresponsible consciousness and ruled by means of the claim that their dark emotions were superior to reason, that knowledge came in blind, causeless fits, blindly to be followed, not doubted—and the kings, who ruled by means of claws and muscles, with conquest as their method and looting as their aim, with a club or a gun as sole sanction of their power. The defenders of man's soul were concerned with his feelings, and the defenders of man's body were concerned with his stomach—but both were united against his mind. Yet no one, not the lowest of humans, is ever able fully to renounce his brain. No one has ever believed in the irrational; what they do believe in is the unjust.

Whenever a man denounces the mind, it is because his goal is of a nature the mind would not permit him to confess. When he preaches contradictions, he does so in the knowledge that someone will accept the burden of the impossible, someone will make it work for him at the price of his own suffering or life; destruction is the price of any contradiction. It is the victims who made injustice possible. It is the men of reason who made it possible for the rule of the brute to work. The despoiling of reason has been the motive of every anti-reason creed on earth. The despoiling of ability has been the purpose of every creed that preached self-sacrifice. The despoilers have always known it. We haven't. The time has come for us to see. What we are now asked to worship, what had once been dressed as God or king, is the naked, twisted, mindless figure of the human Incompetent. This is the new ideal, the goal to aim at, the purpose to live for, and all men are to be rewarded according to how close they approach it. This is the age of the common man, they tell us—a title which any man may claim to the extent of such distinction as he has managed not to achieve. He will rise to a rank of nobility by means of the effort he has failed to make, he will be honored for such virtue as he has not displayed, and he will be paid for the goods which he did not produce. But we—we, who must atone for the guilt of ability—we will work to support him as he orders, with his pleasure as our only reward. Since we have the most to contribute, we will have the least to say. Since we have the better capacity to think, we will not be permitted a thought of our own. Since we have the judgment to act, we will not be permitted an action of our choice. We will work under directives and controls, issued by those who are incapable of working. They will dispose of our energy, because they have none to offer, and of our product, because they can't produce. Do you say that this is impossible, that it cannot be made to work? They know it, but it is you who don't—and they are counting on you not to know it. They are counting on you to go on, to work to the limit of the inhuman and to feed them while you last—and when you collapse, there will be another victim starting out and feeding them, while struggling to survive—and the span of each succeeding victim will be shorter, and while you'll die to leave them a

railroad, your last descendant-in-spirit will die to leave them a loaf of bread.

This does not worry the looters of the moment. Their plan—like all the plans of all the royal looters of the past—is only that the loot shall last their lifetime. It has always lasted before, because in one generation they could not run out of victims. But this time—it will not last. The victims are on strike. We are on strike against martyrdom—and against the moral code that demands it. We are on strike against those who believe that one man must exist for the sake of another. We are on strike against the morality of cannibals, be it practiced in body or in spirit. We will not deal with men on any terms but ours—and our terms are a moral code which holds that man is an end in himself and not the means to any end of others. We do not seek to force our code upon them. They are free to believe what they please. But, for once, they will have to believe it and to exist—without our help. And, once and for all, they will learn the meaning of their creed. That creed has lasted for centuries solely by the sanction of the victims—by means of the victims' acceptance of punishment for breaking a code impossible to practice. But that code was intended to be broken. It is a code that thrives not on those who observe it, but on those who don't, a morality kept in existence not by virtue of its saints, but by the grace of its shiners. We have decided not to be sinners any longer. We have ceased breaking that moral code. We shall blast it out of existence forever by the one method that it can't withstand: by obeying it. We are obeying it. We are complying. In dealing with our fellow men, we are observing their code of values to the letter and sparing them all the evils they denounce. The mind is evil? We have withdrawn the works of our minds from society, and not a single idea of ours is to be known or used by men. Ability is a selfish evil that leaves no chance to those who are less able? We have withdrawn from the competition and left all chances open to incompetents. The pursuit of wealth is greed, the root of all evil? We do not seek to make fortunes any longer. It is evil to earn more than one's bare sustenance? We take nothing but the lowliest jobs and we produce, by the effort of our muscles, no more than we consume for our immediate needs—with not a penny nor an inventive thought left over to harm the world. It is evil to succeed, since success is made by the strong at the expense of the weak? We have ceased burdening the weak with our ambition and have left them free to prosper without us. It is evil to be an employer? We have no employment to offer. It is evil to own property? We own nothing. It is evil to enjoy one's existence in this world? There is no form of enjoyment that we seek from their world, and—this was hardest for us to attain—what we now feel for their world is that emotion which they preach as an ideal: indifference—the blank—the zero—the mark of death. . . .

We are giving men everything they've professed to want and to seek as virtue for centuries. Now let them see whether they want it."

"It was you who started this strike?" she asked.

"I did."

He got up, he stood, hands in pockets, his face in the light—and she saw him smile with the easy, effortless, implacable amusement of certainty.

"We've heard so much about strikes," he said, "and about the dependence of the uncommon man upon the common. We've heard it shouted that the industrialist is a parasite, that his workers support him, create his wealth, make his luxury possible—and what would happen to him if they walked out? Very well. I propose to show to the world who depends on whom, who supports whom, who is the source of wealth, who makes whose livelihood possible and what happens to whom when who walks out."

The windows were now sheets of darkness, reflecting the dots of lighted cigarettes. He picked a cigarette from a table beside him, and in the flare

of a match she saw the brief sparkle of gold, the dollar sign, between his fingers.

"I quit and joined him and went on strike," said Hugh Akston, "because I could not share my profession with men who claim that the qualification of an intellectual consists of denying the existence of the intellect. People would not employ a plumber who'd attempt to prove his professional excellence by asserting that there's no such thing as plumbing—but, apparently, the same standards of caution are not considered necessary in regard to philosophers. I learned from my own pupil, however, that it was I who made this possible. When thinkers accept those who deny the existence of thinking, as fellow thinkers of a different school of thought—it is they who achieve the destruction of the mind. They grant the enemy's basic premise, thus granting the sanction of reason to formal dementia, A basic premise is an absolute that permits no co-operation with its antithesis and tolerates no tolerance. In the same manner and for the same reason as a banker may not accept and pass counterfeit money, granting it the sanction, honor and prestige of his bank, just as he may not grant the counterfeiter's demand for tolerance of a mere difference of opinion—so I may not grant the title of philosopher to Dr. Simon Pritchett or compete with him for the minds of men. Dr. Pritchett has nothing to deposit to the account of philosophy, except his declared intention to destroy it. He seeks to cash in—by means of denying it—on the power of reason among men. He seeks to stamp the mint-mark of reason upon the plans of his looting masters. He seeks to use the prestige of philosophy to purchase the enslavement of thought. But that prestige is an account which can exist only so long as I am there to sign the checks.

Let him do it without me. Let him—and those who entrust to him their children's minds—have exactly that which they demand: a world of intellectuals without intellect and of thinkers who proclaim that they cannot think. I am conceding it. I am complying. And when they see the absolute reality of their non-absolute world, I will not be there and it will not be I who will pay the price of their contradictions."

"Dr. Akston quit on the principle of sound banking," said Midas Mulligan. "I quit on the principle of love. Love is the ultimate form of recognition one grants to superlative values. It was the Hunsacker case that made me quit—that case when a court of law ordered that I honor, as first right to my depositors' funds, the demand of those who would offer proof that they had no right to demand it. I was ordered to hand out money earned by men, to a worthless rotter whose only claim consisted of his inability to earn it. I was born on a farm. I knew the meaning of money. I had dealt with many men in my life. I had watched them grow. I had made my fortune by being able to spot a certain kind of man. The kind who never asked you for faith, hope and charity, but offered you facts, proof and profit. Did you know that I invested in Hank Rearden's business at the time when he was rising, when he had just beaten his way out of Minnesota to buy the steel mills in Pennsylvania? Well, when I looked at that court order on my desk, I had a vision. I saw a picture, and I saw it so clearly that it changed the looks of everything for me. I saw the bright face and the eyes of young Rearden, as he'd been when I'd met him first. I saw him lying at the foot of an altar, with his blood running down into the earth—and what stood on that altar was Lee Hunsacker, with the mucus-filled eyes, whining that he'd never had a chance. . . . It's strange how simple things become, once you see them clearly. It wasn't hard for me to close the bank and go: I kept seeing, for the first time in my life, what it was that I had lived for and loved."

She looked at Judge Narragansett. "You quit over the same case, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Judge Narragansett. "I quit when the court of appeals reversed my ruling. The purpose for which I had chosen my work, was my resolve to be a

guardian of justice. But the laws they asked me to enforce made me the executor of the vilest injustice conceivable. I was asked to use force to violate the rights of disarmed men, who came before me to seek my protection for their rights. Litigants obey the verdict of a tribunal solely on the premise that there is an objective rule of conduct, which they both accept. Now I saw that one man was to be bound by it, but the other was not, one was to obey a rule, the other was to assert an arbitrary wish—his need—and the law was to stand on the side of the wish. Justice was to consist of upholding the unjustifiable. I quit—because I could not have borne to hear the words 'Your Honor' addressed to me by an honest man."

Her eyes moved slowly to Richard Halley, as if she were both pleading and afraid to hear his story. He smiled.

"I would have forgiven men for my struggle," said Richard Halley.

"It was their view of my success that I could not forgive. I had felt no hatred in all the years when they rejected me. If my work was new, I had to give them time to learn, if I took pride in being first to break a trail to a height of my own, I had no right to complain if others were slow to follow. That was what I had told myself through all those years —except on some nights, when I could neither wait nor believe any longer, when I cried 'why?' but found no answer. Then, on the night when they chose to cheer me, I stood before them on the stage of a theater, thinking that this was the moment I had struggled to reach, wishing to feel it, but feeling nothing. I was seeing all the other nights behind me, hearing the 'why?' which still had no answer—and their cheers seemed as empty as their snubs. If they had said, 'Sorry to be so late, thank you for waiting—I would have asked for nothing else and they could have had anything I had to give them. But what I saw in their faces, and in the way they spoke when they crowded to praise me, was the thing I had heard being preached to artists—only I had never believed that anyone human could mean it. They seemed to say that they owed me nothing, that their deafness had provided me with a moral goal, that it had been my duty to struggle, to suffer, to bear—for their sake—whatever sneers, contempt, injustice, torture they chose to inflict upon me, to bear it in order to teach them to enjoy my work, that this was their rightful due and my proper purpose. And then I understood the nature of the looter-in-spirit, a thing I had never been able to conceive. I saw them reaching into my soul, just as they reach into Mulligan's pocket, reaching to expropriate the value of my person, just as they reach to expropriate his wealth—I saw the impertinent malice of mediocrity boastfully holding up its own emptiness as an abyss to be filled by the bodies of its betters—I saw them seeking, just as they seek to feed on Mulligan's money, to feed on those hours when I wrote my music and on that which made me write it, seeking to gnaw their way to self-esteem by extorting from me the admission that they were the goal of my music, so that precisely by reason of my achievement, it would not be they who'd acknowledge my value, but I who would bow to theirs. . . . It was that night that I took the oath never to let them hear another note of mine. The streets were empty when I left that theater, I was the last one to leave—and I saw a man whom I had never seen before, waiting for me in the light of a lamppost. He did not have to tell me much. But the concerto I dedicated to him is called the Concerto of Deliverance."

She looked at the others. "Please tell me your reasons," she said, with a faint stress of firmness in her voice, as if she were taking a beating, but wished to take it to the end.

"I quit when medicine was placed under State control, some years ago," said Dr. Hendricks. "Do you know what it takes to perform a brain operation? Do you know the kind of skill it demands, and the years of passionate, merciless, excruciating devotion that go to acquire that skill? That was what I would not place at the disposal of men whose sole qualification to rule me

was their capacity to spout the fraudulent generalities that got them elected to the privilege of enforcing their wishes at the point of a gun. I would not let them dictate the purpose for which my years of study had been spent, or the conditions of my work, or my choice of patients, or the amount of my reward. I observed that in all the discussions that preceded the enslavement of medicine, men discussed everything—except the desires of the doctors. Men considered only the 'welfare' of the patients, with no thought for those who were to provide it. That a doctor should have any right, desire or choice in the matter, was regarded as irrelevant selfishness; his is not to choose, they said, only 'to serve.' That a man who's willing to work under compulsion is too dangerous a brute to entrust with a job in the stockyards—never occurred to those who proposed to help the sick by making life impossible for the healthy. I have often wondered at the smugness with which people assert their right to enslave me, to control my work, to force my will, to violate my conscience, to stifle my mind—yet what is it that they expect to depend on, when they lie on an operating table under my hands? Their moral code has taught them to believe that it is safe to rely on the virtue of their victims. Well, that is the virtue I have withdrawn. Let them discover the kind of doctors that their system will now produce. Let them discover, in their operating rooms and hospital wards, that it is not safe to place their lives in the hands of a man whose life they have throttled. It is not safe, if he is the sort of man who resents it—and still less safe, if he is the sort who doesn't."

"I quit," said Ellis Wyatt, "because I didn't wish to serve as the cannibals' meal and to do the cooking, besides,"

"I discovered," said Ken Danagger, "that the men I was fighting were impotent. The shiftless, the purposeless, the irresponsible, the irrational—it was not I who needed them, it was not theirs to dictate terms to me, it was not mine to obey demands. I quit, to let them discover it, too."

"I quit," said Quentin Daniels, "because, if there are degrees of damnation, the scientist who places his mind in the service of brute force is the longest-range murderer on earth."

They were silent. She turned to Galt. "And you?" she asked. "You were first. What made you come to it?"

He chuckled, "My refusal to be born with any original sin."

"What do you mean?"

"I have never felt guilty of my ability. I have never felt guilty of my mind. I have never felt guilty of being a man. I accepted no unearned guilt, and thus was free to earn and to know my own value. Ever since I can remember, I had felt that I would kill the man who'd claim that I exist for the sake of his need—and I had known that this was the highest moral feeling. That night, at the Twentieth Century meeting, when I heard an unspeakable evil being spoken in a tone of moral righteousness, I saw the root of the world's tragedy, the key to it and the solution. I saw what had to be done. I went out to do it."

"And the motor?" she asked. "Why did you abandon it? Why did you leave it to the Starnes heirs?"

"It was then- father's property. He paid me for it. It was made on his time. But I knew that it would be of no benefit to them and that no one would ever hear of it again. It was my first experimental model.

Nobody but me or my equivalent could have been able to complete it or even to grasp what it was. And I knew that no equivalent of mine would come near that factory from then on."

"You knew the kind of achievement your motor represented?"

"Yes."

"And you knew you were leaving it to perish?"

"Yes." He looked off into the darkness beyond the windows and chuckled softly, but it was not a sound of amusement. "I looked at my motor for the last tune, before I left. I thought of the men who claim that wealth is a matter of natural resources—and of the men who claim that wealth is a matter of seizing the factories—and of the men who claim that machines condition their brains. Well, there was the motor to condition them, and there it remained as just exactly what it is without man's mind—as a pile of metal scraps and wires, going to rust. You have been thinking of the great service which that motor could have rendered to mankind, if it had been put into production. I think that on the day when men understand the meaning of its fate in that factory's junk heap—it will have rendered a greater one."

"Did you expect to see that day, when you left it?"

"No."

"Did you expect a chance to rebuild it elsewhere?”

"No."

"And you were willing to let it remain in a junk heap?"

"For the sake of what that motor meant to me," he said slowly, "I had to be willing to let it crumble and vanish forever"—he looked straight at her and she heard the steady, unhesitant, uninflected ruthlessness of his voice—"just as you will have to be willing to let the rail of Taggart Transcontinental crumble and vanish."

She held his eyes, her head was lifted, and she said softly, in the tone of a proudly open plea, "Don't make me answer you now."

"I won't. We'll tell you whatever you wish to know. We won't urge you to make a decision." He added, and she was shocked by the sudden gentleness of his voice, "I said that that kind of indifference toward a world which should have been ours was the hardest thing to attain. I know. We've all gone through it."

She looked at the quiet, impregnable room, and at the light—the light that came from his motor—on the faces of men who were the most serene and confident gathering she had ever attended.

"What did you do, when you walked out of the Twentieth Century?"

she asked.

"I went out to become a flame-spotter. I made it my job to watch for those bright flares in the growing night of savagery, which were the men of ability, the men of the mind—to watch their course, their struggle and their agony—and to pull them out, when I knew that they had seen enough."

"What did you tell them to make them abandon everything?"

"I told them that they were right."

In answer to the silent question of her glance, he added, "I gave them the pride they did not know they had. I gave them the words to identify it. I gave them that priceless possession which they had missed, had longed for, yet had not known they needed: a moral sanction. Did you call me the destroyer and the hunter of men? I was the walking delegate of this strike, the leader of the victims' rebellion, the defender of the oppressed, the disinherited, the exploited—and when I use these words, they have, for once, a literal meaning."

"Who were the first to follow you?"

He let a moment pass, in deliberate emphasis, then answered, "My two best friends. You know one of them. You know, perhaps better than anyone else, what price he paid for it. Our own teacher, Dr.

Akston, was next. He joined us within one evening's conversation. William Hastings, who had been my boss in the research laboratory of Twentieth Century Motors, had a hard time, fighting it out with himself. It took him a year. But he joined. Then Richard Halley. Then Midas Mulligan."

"—who took fifteen minutes," said Mulligan.

She turned to him. "It was you who established this valley?"

"Yes," said Mulligan. "It was just my own private retreat, at first. I bought it years ago, I bought miles of these mountains, section by section, from ranchers and cattlemen who didn't know what they owned. The valley is not listed on any map. I built this house, when I decided to quit. I cut off all possible avenues of approach, except one road—and it's camouflaged beyond anyone's power to discover—and I stocked this place to be self-supporting, so that I could live here for the rest of my life and never have to see the face of a looter. When I heard that John had got Judge Narragansett, too, I invited the Judge to come here. Then we asked Richard Halley to join us. The others remained outside, at first."

"We had no rules of any kind," said Galt, "except one. When a man took our oath, it meant a single commitment: not to work in his own profession, not to give to the world the benefit of his mind. Each of us carried it out in any manner he chose. Those who had money, retired to live on their savings. Those who had to work, took the lowest jobs they could find. Some of us had been famous; others—like that young brakeman of yours, whom Halley discovered—were stopped by us before they had set out to get tortured. But we did not give up our minds or the work we loved. Each of us continued in his real profession, in whatever manner and spare time he could manage—but he did it secretly, for his own sole benefit, giving nothing to men, sharing nothing. We were scattered all over the country, as the outcasts we had always been, only now we accepted our parts with conscious intention.

Our sole relief were the rare occasions when we could see one another.

We found that we liked to meet—in order to be reminded that human beings still existed. So we came to set aside one month a year to spend in this valley—to rest, to live in a rational world, to bring our real work out of hiding, to trade our achievements—here, where achievements meant payment, not expropriation. Each of us built his own house here, at his own expense—for one month of life out of twelve.

It made the eleven easier to bear."

"You see, Miss Taggart," said Hugh Akston, "man is a social being, but not in the way the looters preach."

"It's the destruction of Colorado that started the growth of this valley," said Midas Mulligan. "Ellis Wyatt and the others came to live here permanently, because they had to hide. Whatever part of their wealth they could salvage, they converted into gold or machines, as I had, and they brought it here. There were enough of us to develop the place and to create jobs for those who had had to earn their living outside. We have now reached the stage where most of us can live here full time. The valley is almost self-supporting—and as to the goods that we can't yet produce, I purchase them from the outside through a pipe line of my own. It's a special agent, a man who does not let my money reach the looters. We are not a state here, not a society of any kind—

we're just a voluntary association of men held together by nothing but every man's self-interest. I own the valley and I sell the land to the others, when they want it. Judge Narragansett is to act as our arbiter, hi case of disagreements. He hasn't had to be called upon, as yet. They say that it's hard for men to agree. You'd be surprised how easy it is—

when both parties hold as their moral absolute that neither exists for the sake of the other and that reason is their only means of trade. The time is approaching when all of us will have to be called to live here—

because the world is falling apart so fast that it will soon be starving.

But we will be able to support ourselves in this valley."

"The world is crashing faster than we expected," said Hugh Akston.

"Men are stopping and giving up. Your frozen trains, the gangs of raiders, the deserters, they're men who've never heard of us, and they're not part of our strike, they are acting on their own—it's the natural response of

whatever rationality is still left in them—it's the same kind of protest as ours."

"We started with no time limit in view," said Galt. "We did not know whether we'd live to see the liberation of the world or whether we'd have to leave our battle and our secret to the next generations.

We knew only that this was the only way we cared to live. But now we think that we will see, and soon, the day of our victory and of our return."

"When?" she whispered.

"When the code of the looters has collapsed."

He saw her looking at him, her glance half-question, half-hope, and he added, "When the creed of self-immolation has run, for once, its undisguised course—when men find no victims ready to obstruct the path of justice and to deflect the fall of retribution on themselves—

when the preachers of self-sacrifice discover that those who are willing to practice it, have nothing to sacrifice, and those who have, are not willing any longer—when men see that neither their hearts nor their muscles can save them, but the mind they damned is not there to answer then: screams for help—when they collapse as they must, as men without mind—when they have no pretense of authority left, no remnant of law, no trace of morality, no hope, no food and no way to obtain it—when they collapse and the road is clear—then we'll come back to rebuild the world."

The Taggart Terminal, she thought; she heard the words beating through the numbness of her mind, as the sum of a burden she had not had time to weigh. This was the Taggart Terminal, she thought, this room, not the giant concourse in New York—this was her goal, the end of track, the point beyond the curve of the earth where the two straight lines of rail met and vanished, drawing her forward—as they had drawn Nathaniel Taggart—this was the goal Nathaniel Taggart had seen in the distance and this was the point still holding the straight-line glance of his lifted head above the spiral motion of men in the granite concourse. It was for the sake of this that she had dedicated herself to the rail of Taggart Transcontinental, as to the body of a spirit yet to be found. She had found it, everything she had ever wanted, it was here in this room, reached and hers—but the price was that net of rail behind her, the rail that would vanish, the bridges that would crumble, the signal lights that would go out. . . . And yet . . . Everything I had ever wanted, she thought—looking away from the figure of a man with sun-colored hair and implacable eyes.

"You don't have to answer us now."

She raised her head; he was watching her as if he had followed the steps in her mind.

"We never demand agreement," he said. "We never tell anyone more than he is ready to hear You are the first person who has learned our secret ahead of time. But you're here and you had to know. Now you know the exact nature of the choice you'll have to make. If it seems hard, it's because you still think that it does not have to be one or the other. You will learn that it does."

"Will you give me time?"

"Your time is not ours to give. Take your time. You alone can decide what you'll choose to do, and when. We know the cost of that decision. We've paid it. That you've come here might now make it easier for you—or harder."

"Harder," she whispered.

"I know."

He said it, his voice as low as hers, with the same sound of being forced past one's breath, and she missed an instant of time, as in the stillness after a blow, because she felt that this—not the moments when he had carried her in his arms down the mountainside, but this meeting of their voices—had been the closest physical contact between them.

A full moon stood in the sky above the valley, when they drove back to his house; it stood like a flat, round lantern without rays, with a haze of light hanging in space, not reaching the ground, and the illumination seemed to come from the abnormal white brightness of the soil. In the unnatural stillness of sight without color, the earth seemed veiled by a film of distance, its shapes did not merge into a landscape, but went slowly flowing past, like the print of a photograph on a cloud.

She noticed suddenly that she was smiling. She was looking down at the houses of the valley. Their lighted windows were dimmed by a bluish cast, the outlines of their walls were dissolving, long bands of mist were coiling among them in torpid, unhurried waves. It looked like a city sinking under water.

"What do they call this place?" she asked.

"I call it Mulligan's Valley," he said. "The others call it Galt's Gulch."

"I'd call it—" but she did not finish.

He glanced at her. She knew what he saw in her face. He turned away.

She saw a faint movement of his lips, like the release of a breath that he was forcing to function. She dropped her glance, her arm falling against the side of the car, as if her hand were suddenly too heavy for the weakness in the crook of her elbow.

The road grew darker, as it went higher, and pine branches met over their heads. Above a slant of rock moving to meet them, she saw the moonlight on the windows of his house. Her head fell back against the seat and she lay still, losing awareness of the car, feeling only the motion that carried her forward, watching the glittering drops of water in the pine branches, which were the stars.

When the car stopped, she did not permit herself to know why she did not look at him as she stepped, out. She did not know that she stood still for an instant, looking up at the dark windows. She did not hear him approach; but she felt the impact of his hands with shocking intensity, as if it were the only awareness she could now experience.

He lifted her in his arms and started slowly up the path to the house.

He walked, not looking at her, holding her tight, as if trying to hold a progression of time, as if his arms were still locked over the moment when he had lifted her against his chest. She felt his steps as if they were a single span of motion to a goal and as if each step were a separate moment in which she dared not think of the next.

Her head was close to his, his hair brushing her cheek, and she knew that neither of them would move his face that one breath closer. It was a sudden, stunned state of quiet drunkenness, complete in itself, their hair mingled like the rays of two bodies in space that had achieved their meeting, she saw that he walked with his eyes closed, as if even sight would now be an intrusion.

He entered the house, and as he moved across the living room, he did not look to his left and neither did she, but she knew that both of them were seeing the door on his left that led to his bedroom. He walked the length of the darkness to the wedge of moonlight that fell across the guest-room bed, he placed her down upon it, she felt an instant's pause of his hands still holding her shoulder and waistline, and when his hands left her body, she knew that the moment was over.

He stepped back and pressed a switch, surrendering the room to the harshly public glare of light. He stood still, as if demanding that she look at him, his face expectant and stern.

"Have you forgotten that you wanted to shoot me on sight?" he asked.

It was the unprotected stillness of his figure that made it real. The shudder that threw her upright was like a cry of terror and denial; but she held his glance and answered evenly, "That's true. I did."

"Then stand by it."

Her voice was low, its intensity was both a surrender and a scornful reproach: "You know better than that, don't you?"

He shook his head. "No. I want you to remember that that had been your wish. You were right, in the past. So long as you were part of the outer world, you had to seek to destroy me. And of the two courses now open to you, one will lead you to the day when you will find yourself forced to do it." She did not answer, she sat looking down, he saw the strands of her hair swing jerkily as she shook her head in desperate protest. "You are my only danger. You are the only person who could deliver me to my enemies. If you remain with them, you will. Choose that, if you wish, but choose it with full knowledge.

Don't answer me now. But until you do"—the stress of severity in his voice was the sound of effort directed against himself—"remember that I know the meaning of either answer."

"As fully as I do?" she whispered.

"As fully."

He turned to go, when her eyes fell suddenly upon the inscriptions she had noticed, and forgotten, on the walls of the room.

They were cut into the polish of the wood, still showing the force of the pencil's pressure in the hands that had made them, each in his own violent writing: "You'll get over it—Ellis Wyatt" "It will be all right by morning—Ken Danagger" "It's worth it—Roger Marsh."

There were others, "What is that?" she asked.

He smiled. "This is the room where they spent their first night in the valley. The first night is the hardest. It's the last pull of the break with one's memories, and the worst. I let them stay here, so they can call for me, if they want me. I speak to them, if they can't sleep.

Most of them can't. But they're free of it by morning. . . . They've all gone through this room. Now they call it the torture chamber or the anteroom—because everyone has to enter the valley through my house."

He turned to go, he stopped on the threshold and added: "This is the room I never intended you to occupy. Good night, Miss Taggart."