larger than you could hope to realize from the sale of the metal for the next twenty years."

"The State Science Institute is a scientific establishment, not a commercial one," said Rearden. "What is it that they're so afraid of?"

"You are using ugly, unnecessary words, Mr. Rearden. I am endeavoring to suggest that we keep the discussion on a friendly plane. The matter is serious."

"I am beginning to see that."

"We are offering you a blank check on what is, as you realize, an unlimited account. What else can you want? Name your price."

"The sale of the rights to Rearden Metal is not open to discussion. If you have anything else to say, please say it and leave."

The man leaned back, looked at Rearden incredulously and asked, "What are you after?"

"I? What do you mean?"

"You're in business to make money, aren't you?"

"I am."

"You want to make as big a profit as possible, don't you?"

"I do."

"Then why do you want to struggle for years, squeezing out your gains in the form of pennies per ton—rather than accept a fortune for Rearden Metal? Why?"

"Because it's *mine*. Do you understand the word?"

The man sighed and rose to his feet. "I hope you will not have cause to regret your decision, Mr. Rearden," he said; the tone of his voice was suggesting the opposite.

"Good day," said Rearden.

"I think I must tell you that the State Science Institute may issue an official statement condemning Rearden Metal."

"That is their privilege."

"Such a statement would make things more difficult for you."

"Undoubtedly."

"As to further consequences . . ." The man shrugged. "This is not the day for people who refuse to co-operate. In this age, one needs friends. You are not a popular man, Mr. Rearden."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Surely, you understand."

"I don't."

"Society is a complex structure. There are so many different issues awaiting decision, hanging by a thin thread. We can never tell when one such issue may be decided and what may be the decisive factor in a delicate balance. Do I make myself clear?"

"No."

The red flame of poured steel shot through the twilight. An orange glow, the color of deep gold, hit the wall behind Rearden's desk. The glow moved gently across his forehead. His face had an unmoving serenity.

"The State Science Institute is a *government* organization, Mr. Rearden. There are certain bills pending in the Legislature, which may

be passed at any moment. Businessmen are peculiarly vulnerable these days. I am sure you understand me."

Rearden rose to his feet. He was smiling. He looked as if all tension had left him.

"No, Dr. Potter," he said, "I don't understand. If I did, I'd have to kill you."

The man walked to the door, then stopped and looked at Rearden in a way which, for once, was simple human curiosity. Rearden stood motionless against the moving glow on the wall; he stood casually, his hands in his pockets.

"Would you tell me," the man asked, "just between us, it's only my personal curiosity—why are you doing this?"

Rearden answered quietly, "I'll tell you. You won't understand. You see, it's because Rearden Metal is good."

* *

Dagny could not understand Mr. Mowen's motive. The Amalgamated Switch and Signal Company had suddenly given notice that they would not complete her order. Nothing had happened, she could find no cause for it and they would give no explanation.

She had hurried to Connecticut, to see Mr. Mowen in person, but the sole result of the interview was a heavier, grayer weight of bewilderment in her mind. Mr. Mowen stated that he would not continue to make switches of Rearden Metal. For sole explanation, he said, avoiding her eyes, "Too many people don't like it."

"What? Rearden Metal or your making the switches?"

"Both, I guess . . . People don't like it . . . I don't want any trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Any kind."

"Have you heard a single thing against Rearden Metal that's true?"

"Aw, who knows what's true? . . . That resolution of the National Council of Metal Industries said—"

"Look, you've worked with metals all your life. For the last four months, you've worked with Rearden Metal. Don't you know that it's the greatest thing you've ever handled?" He did not answer. "Don't you know it?" He looked away. "Don't you know what's true?"

"Hell, Miss Taggart, I'm in business. I'm only a little guy. I just want to make money."

"How do you think one makes it?"

But she knew that it was useless. Looking at Mr. Mowen's face, at the eyes which she could not catch, she felt as she had felt once on a lonely section of track, when a storm blew down the telephone wires: that communications were cut and that words had become sounds which transmitted nothing.

It was useless to argue, she thought, and to wonder about people who would neither refute an argument nor accept it. Sitting restlessly in the train, on her way back to New York, she told herself that Mr. Mowen did not matter, that nothing mattered now, except finding somebody else to manufacture the switches. She was wrestling with

a list of names in her mind, wondering who would be easiest to convince, to beg or to bribe.

She knew, the moment she entered the anteroom of her office, that something had happened. She saw the unnatural stillness, with the faces of her staff turned to her as if her entrance were the moment they had all waited for, hoped for and dreaded.

Eddie Willers rose to his feet and started toward the door of her office, as if knowing that she would understand and follow. She had seen his face. No matter what it was, she thought, she wished it had not hurt him quite so badly.

"The State Science Institute," he said quietly, when they were alone in her office, "has issued a statement warning people against the use of Rearden Metal." He added, "It was on the radio. It's in the afternoon papers."

"What did they say?"

"Dagny, they didn't say it! . . . They haven't really said it, yet it's there--and it—isn't. That's what's monstrous about it."

His effort was focused on keeping his voice quiet; he could not control his words. The words were forced out of him by the unbelieving, bewildered indignation of a child screaming in denial at his first encounter with evil.

"What did they say, Eddie?"

"They . . . You'd have to read it." He pointed to the newspaper he had left on her desk. "They haven't said that Rearden Metal is bad. They haven't said that it's unsafe. What they've done is . . ." His hands spread and dropped in a gesture of futility.

She saw at a glance what they had done. She saw the sentences: "It may be possible that after a period of heavy usage, a sudden fissure may appear, though the length of this period cannot be predicted. . . . The possibility of a molecular reaction, at present unknown, cannot be entirely discounted. . . . Although the tensile strength of the metal is obviously demonstrable, certain questions in regard to its behavior under unusual stress are not to be ruled out. . . ." Although there is no evidence to support the contention that the use of the metal should be prohibited, a further study of its properties would be of value."

"We can't fight it. It can't be answered," Eddie was saying slowly. "We can't demand a retraction. We can't show them our tests or prove anything. They've said nothing. They haven't said a thing that could be refuted and embarrass them professionally. It's the job of a coward. You'd expect it from some con-man or blackmailer. But, Dagny! It's the State Science Institute!"

She nodded silently. She stood, her eyes fixed on some point beyond the window. At the end of a dark street, the bulbs of an electric sign kept going on and off, as if winking at her maliciously.

Eddie gathered his strength and said in the tone of a military report, "Taggart stock has crashed. Ben Nealy quit. The National Brotherhood of Road and Track Workers has forbidden its members to work on the Rio Norte Line. Jim has left town."

She took her hat and coat off, walked across the room and slowly, very deliberately sat down at her desk.