

ber; it was now approaching the price of two hundred—while the printing presses of the government treasury were running a race with starvation, and losing.

When the workers of a factory beat up their foreman and wrecked the machinery in a fit of despair—no action could be taken against them. Arrests were futile, the jails were full, the arresting officers winked at their prisoners and let them escape on their way to prison—men were going through the motions prescribed for the moment, with no thought of the moment to follow. No action could be taken when mobs of starving people attacked warehouses on the outskirts of cities. No action could be taken when punitive squadrons joined the people they had been sent to punish.

"Are you listening, John Galt? . . . We wish to negotiate. We might meet your terms . . . Are you listening?"

There were whispered rumors of covered wagons traveling by night through abandoned trails, and of secret settlements armed to resist the attacks of those whom they called the "Indians"—the attacks of any looting savages, be they homeless mobs or government agents. Lights were seen, once in a while, on the distant horizon of a prairie, in the hills, on the ledges of mountains, where no buildings had been known to exist. But no soldiers could be persuaded to investigate the sources of those lights.

On the doors of abandoned houses, on the gates of crumbling factories, on the walls of government buildings, there appeared, once in a while, traced in chalk, in paint, in blood, the curving mark which was the sign of the dollar.

"Can you hear us, John Galt? . . . Send us word. Name your terms. We will meet any terms you set. Can you hear us?"

There was no answer.

The shaft of red smoke that shot to the sky on the night of January 22 and stood abnormally still for a while, like a solemn memorial obelisk, then wavered and swept back and forth across the sky, like a searchlight sending some undecipherable message, then went out as abruptly as it had come, marked the end of Rearden Steel—but the inhabitants of the area did not know it. They learned it only on subsequent nights, when they—who had cursed the mills for the smoke, the fumes, the soot and the noise—looked out and, instead of the glow pulsating with life on their familiar horizon, they saw a black void.

The mills had been nationalized, as the property of a deserter. The first bearer of the title of "People's Manager," appointed to run the mills, had been a man of the Orren Boyle faction, a pudgy hanger-on of the metallurgical industry, who had wanted nothing but to follow his employees while going through the motions of leading. But at the end of a month, after too many clashes with the workers, too many occasions when his only answer had been that he couldn't help it, too many undelivered orders, too many telephonic pressures from his buddies, he had begged to be transferred to some other position. The Orren Boyle faction had been falling apart, since Mr. Boyle had been confined to a rest home, where his doctor had forbidden him any contact with business and had put him to the job of

weaving baskets, as a means of occupational therapy.. The second "People's Manager" sent to Rearden Steel had belonged to the faction of Cuffy Meigs. He had worn leather leggings and perfumed hair lotions, he had come to work with a gun on his hip, he had kept snapping that discipline was his primary goal and that by God he'd get it or else. The only discernible rule of the discipline had been his order forbidding all questions. After weeks of frantic activity on the part of insurance companies, of firemen, of ambulances and of first-aid units, attending to a series of inexplicable accidents—the "People's Manager" had vanished one morning, having sold and shipped to sundry racketeers of Europe and Latin America most of the cranes, the automatic conveyors, the supplies of refractory brick, the emergency power generator, and the carpet from what had once been Rearden's office.

No one had been able to untangle the issues in the violent chaos of the next few days—the issues had never been named, the sides had remained unacknowledged, but everyone had known that the bloody encounters between the older workers and the newer had not been driven to such ferocious intensity by the trivial causes that kept setting them off—neither guards nor policemen nor state troopers had been able to keep order for the length of a day—nor could any faction muster a candidate willing to accept the post of "People's Manager." On January 22, the operations of Rearden Steel had been ordered temporarily suspended.

The shaft of red smoke, that night, had been caused by a sixty-year-old worker, who had set fire to one of the structures and had been caught in the act, laughing dazedly and staring at the flames. "To avenge Hank Rearden!" he had cried defiantly, tears running down his furnace-tanned face.

Don't let it hurt you like this—thought Dagny, slumped across her desk, over the page of the newspaper where a single brief paragraph announced the "temporary" end of Rearden Steel—don't let it hurt you so much. . . . She kept seeing the face of Hank Rearden, as he had stood at the window of his office, watching a crane move against the sky with a load of green-blue rail . . . Don't let it hurt him like this—was the plea in her mind, addressed to no one—don't let him hear of it, don't let him know. . . . Then she saw another face, a face with unflinching green eyes, saying to her, in a voice made implacable by the quality of respect for facts: "You'll have to hear about it. . . . You'll hear about every wreck. You'll hear about every discontinued train. . . . Nobody stays in this valley by faking reality in any manner whatever. . . ." Then she sat still, with no sight and no sound in her mind, with nothing but that enormous presence which was pain—until she heard the familiar cry that had become a drug killing all sensations except the capacity to act: "Miss Taggart, we don't know what to do!"—and she shot to her feet to answer.

"The People's State of Guatemala," said the newspapers on January 26, "declines the request of the United States for the loan of a thousand tons of steel."

On the night of February 3, a young pilot was flying his usual route, a weekly flight from Dallas to New York City. When he