reached the empty darkness beyond Philadelphia—in the place where the flames of Rearden Steel had for years been his favorite landmark, his greeting in the loneliness of night, the beacon of a living earth—he saw a snow-covered spread, dead-white and phosphorescent in the starlight, a spread of peaks and craters that looked like the surface of the moon. He quit his job, next morning.

Through the frozen nights, over dying cities, knocking in vain at unanswering windows, beating on unechoing walls, rising above the roofs of lightless buildings and the skeletal girders of ruins, the plea went on crying through space, crying to the stationary motion of the stars, to the heatless fire of their twinkling: "Can you hear us, John Galt? Can you hear us?"

"Miss Taggart, we don't know what to do," said Mr. Thompson: he had summoned her to a personal conference on one of his scurrying trips to New York. "We're ready to give in, to meet his terms, to let him take over—but where is he?"

"For the third time," she said, her face and voice shut tight against any fissure of emotion, "I do not know where he is. What made you think I did?"

"Well, I didn't know, I had to try . . . I thought, just in case . . . I thought, maybe if you had a way to reach him—"

"I haven't."

"You see, we can't announce, not even by short-wave radio, that we're willing to surrender altogether. People might hear it. But if you had some way to reach him, to let him know that we're ready to give in, to scrap our policies, to do anything he tells us to—"

"I said I haven't."

"If he'd only agree to a conference, just a conference, it wouldn't commit him to anything, would it? We're willing to turn the whole economy over to him—if he'd only tell us when, where, how. If he'd give us some word or sign . . . if he'd answer us . . . Why doesn't he answer?"

"You've heard his speech."

"But what are we to do? We can't just quit and leave the country without any government at all. I shudder to think what would happen. With the kind of social elements now on the loose—why, Miss Taggart, it's all I can do to keep them in line or we'd have plunder and bloody murder in broad daylight. I don't know what's got into people, but they just don't seem to be civilized any more. We can't quit at a time like this. We can neither quit nor run things any longer. What are we to do, Miss Taggart?"

"Start decontrolling."

"Huh?"

"Start lifting taxes and removing controls."

"Oh, no, no, no! That's out of the question!"

"Out of whose question?"

"I mean, not at this time, Miss Taggart, not at this time. The country isn't ready for it. Personally, I'd agree with you, I'm a freedom-loving man, Miss Taggart, I'm not after power—but this is an emergency. People aren't ready for freedom. We've got to keep a strong hand. We can't adopt an idealistic theory, which—"

"Then don't ask me what to do," she said, and rose to her feet.

"But, Miss Taggart—"

"I didn't come here to argue."

She was at the door when he sighed and said, "I hope he's still alive." She stopped. "I hope they haven't done anything rash."

A moment passed before she was able to ask, "Who?" and to make it a word, not a scream.

He shrugged, spreading his arms and letting them drop helplessly. "I can't hold my own boys in line any longer. I can't tell what they might attempt to do. There's one clique—the Ferris-Lawson-Meigs faction—that's been after me for over a year to adopt stronger measures. A tougher policy, they mean. Frankly, what they mean is: to resort to terror. Introduce the death penalty for civilian crimes, for critics, dissenters and the like. Their argument is that since people won't co-operate, won't act for the public interest voluntarily, we've got to force them to. Nothing will make our system work, they say, but terror. And they may be right, from the look of things nowadays. But Wesley won't go for strong-arm methods, Wesley is a peaceful man, a liberal, and so am I. We're trying to keep the Ferris boys in check, but . . . You see, they're set against any surrender to John Galt. They don't want us to deal with him. They don't want us to find him. I wouldn't put anything past them. If they found him first, they'd—there's no telling what they might do. . . . That's what worries me. Why doesn't he answer? Why hasn't he answered us at all? What if they've found him and killed him? I wouldn't know. . . So I hoped that perhaps you had some way . . . some means of knowing that he's still alive . . ." His voice trailed off into a question mark.

The whole of her resistance against a rush of liquefying terror went into the effort to keep her voice as stiff as her knees, long enough to say, "I do not know," and her knees stiff enough to carry her out of the room.

* *

From behind the rotted posts of what had once been a corner vegetable stand, Dagny glanced furtively back at the street: the rare lamp posts broke the street into separate islands, she could see a pawnshop in the first patch of light, a saloon in the next, a church in the farthest, and black gaps between them; the sidewalks were deserted; it was hard to tell, but the street seemed empty.

She turned the corner, with deliberately resonant steps, then stopped abruptly to listen: it was hard to tell whether the abnormal tightness inside her chest was the sound of her own heartbeats, and hard to distinguish it from the sound of distant wheels and from the glassy rustle which was the East River somewhere close by; but she heard no sound of human steps behind her. She jerked her shoulders, it was part-shrug, part-shudder, and she walked faster. A rusty clock in some unlighted cavern coughed out the hour of four A M

The fear of being followed did not seem fully real, as no fear could be real to her now. She wondered whether the unnatural lightness of her body was a state of tension or relaxation; her body seemed drawn so tightly that she felt as if it were reduced to a single attribute: to the power of motion; her mind seemed inaccessibly relaxed, like a