She drank the coffee, concerned with nothing but the pleasure of feeling as if the hot liquid were reviving the arteries of her body.

"I can tell you," said a small, shriveled tramp who wore a cap pulled low over his eyes. "I know."

Nobody heard him or paid any attention. The young boy was watching Dagny with a kind of fierce, purposeless intensity.

"You're not afraid," he said to her suddenly, without explanation, a flat statement in a brusque, lifeless voice that had a note of wonder.

She looked at him. "No," she said, "I'm not."

"I know who is John Galt," said the tramp. "It's a secret, but I know it."

"Who?" she asked without interest.

"An explorer," said the tramp. "The greatest explorer that ever lived. The man who found the fountain of youth."

"Give me another cup. Black," said the old bum, pushing his cup across the counter.

"John Galt spent years looking for it. He crossed oceans, and he crossed deserts, and he went down into forgotten mines, miles under the earth. But he found it on the top of a mountain. It took him ten years to climb that mountain. It broke every bone in his body, it tore the skin off his hands, it made him lose his home, his name, his love. But he climbed it. He found the fountain of youth, which he wanted to bring down to men. Only he never came back."

"Why didn't he?" she asked.

"Because he found that it couldn't be brought down."

* *

The man who sat in front of Rearden's desk had vague features and a manner devoid of all emphasis, so that one could form no specific image of his face nor detect the driving motive of his person. His only mark of distinction seemed to be a bulbous nose, a bit too large for the rest of him; his manner was meek, but it conveyed a preposterous hint, the hint of a threat deliberately kept furtive, yet intended to be recognized. Rearden could not understand the purpose of his visit. He was Dr. Potter, who held some undefined position with the State Science Institute.

"What do you want?" Rearden asked for the third time.

"It is the social aspect that I am asking you to consider, Mr. Rearden," the man said softly. "I urge you to take note of the age we're living in. Our economy is not ready for it."

"For what?"

"Our economy is in a state of extremely precarious equilibrium. We all have to pool our efforts to save it from collapse."

"Well, what is it you want me to do?"

"These are the considerations which I was asked to call to your attention. I am from the State Science Institute, Mr. Rearden."

"You've said so before. But what did you wish to see me about?"

"The State Science Institute does not hold a favorable opinion of Rearden Metal."

"You've said that, too."

"Isn't that a factor which you must take into consideration?"

"No."

The light was growing dim in the broad windows of the office. The days were short. Rearden saw the irregular shadow of the nose on the man's cheek, and the pale eyes watching him; the glance was vague, but its direction purposeful.

"The State Science Institute represents the best brains of the country, Mr. Rearden."

"So I'm told."

"Surely you do not want to pit your own judgment against theirs?"

"I do."

The man looked at Rearden as if pleading for help, as if Rearden had broken an unwritten code which demanded that he should have understood long ago. Rearden offered no help.

"Is this all you wanted to know?" he asked.

"It's only a question of time, Mr. Rearden," the man said placatingly. "Just a temporary delay. Just to give our economy a chance to get stabilized. If you'd only wait for a couple of years—"

Rearden chuckled, gaily, contemptuously. "So that's what you're after? Want me to take Rearden Metal off the market? Why?"

"Only for a few years, Mr. Rearden. Only until—"

"Look," said Rearden. "Now I'll ask you a question: did your scientists decide that Rearden Metal is not what I claim it is?"

"We have not committed ourselves as to that."

"Did they decide it's no good?"

"It is the social impact of a product that must be considered. We are thinking in terms of the country as a whole, we are concerned with the public welfare and the terrible crisis of the present moment, which—"

"Is Rearden Metal good or not?"

"If we view the picture from the angle of the alarming growth of unemployment; which at present—"

"Is Rearden Metal good?"

"At a time of desperate steel shortage, we cannot afford to permit the expansion of a steel company which produces too much, because it might throw out of business the companies which produce too little, thus creating an unbalanced economy which—"

"Are you going to answer my question?"

The man shrugged. "Questions of value are relative. If Rearden Metal is not good, it's a physical danger to the public. If it is good it's a social danger."

"If you have anything to say to me about the physical danger of Rearden Metal, say it. Drop the rest of it. Fast. I don't speak that language."

"But surely questions of social welfare—"

"Drop it."

The man looked bewildered and lost, as if the ground had been cut from under his feet. In a moment, he asked helplessly, "But what, then, is your chief concern?"

"The market."

"How do you mean?"

"There's a market for Rearden Metal and I intend to take full advantage of it."

"Isn't the market somewhat hypothetical? The public response to your metal has not been encouraging. Except for the order from Taggart Transcontinental, you haven't obtained any major—"

"Well, then, if you think the public won't go for it, what are you worrying about?"

"If the public doesn't go for it, you will take a heavy loss, Mr. Rearden."

"That's my worry, not yours."

"Whereas, if you adopt a more co-operative attitude and agree to wait for a few years—"

"Why should I wait?"

"But I believe I have made it clear that the State Science Institute does not approve of the appearance of Rearden Metal on the metallurgical scene at the present time."

"Why should I give a damn about that?"

The man sighed. "You are a very difficult man, Mr. Rearden."

The sky of the late afternoon was growing heavy, as if thickening against the glass of the windowpanes. The outlines of the man's figure seemed to dissolve into a blob among the sharp, straight planes of the furniture.

"I gave you this appointment," said Rearden, "because you told me that you wished to discuss something of extreme importance. If this is all you had to say, you will please excuse me now. I am very busy."

The man settled back in his chair. "I believe you have spent ten years of research on Rearden Metal," he said. "How much has it cost you?"

Rearden glanced up: he could not understand the drift of the question, yet there was an undisguised purposefulness in the man's voice; the voice had hardened.

"One and a half million dollars," said Rearden.

"How much will you take for it?"

Rearden had to let a moment pass. He could not believe it. "For what?" he asked, his voice low.

"For all rights to Rearden Metal."

"I think you had better get out of here," said Rearden.

"There is no call for such an attitude. You are a businessman. I am offering you a business proposition. You may name your own price."

"The *rights* to Rearden Metal are not for sale."

"I am in a position to speak of large sums of money. *Government* money."

Rearden sat without moving, the muscles of his cheeks pulled tight; but his glance was indifferent, focused only by the faint pull of morbid curiosity.

"You are a businessman, Mr. Rearden. This is a proposition which you cannot afford to ignore. On the one hand, you are gambling against great odds, you are bucking an unfavorable public opinion, you run a good chance of losing every penny you put into Rearden Metal. On the other hand, we can relieve you of the risk and the responsibility; at an impressive profit, an immediate profit, much