

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 Sebastián d'Anconia.

As if in deliberate answer to her involuntary movement of escape,