

spend her time bargaining about sixty miles and sixty cars? She could not descend to an existence where her brain would explode under the pressure of forcing itself not to outdistance incompetence. She could not function to the rule of: Pipe down—keep down—slow down—don't do your best, it is not wanted!

She turned resolutely and left the vault, to take the train for Washington.

It seemed to her, as she locked the steel door, that she heard a faint echo of steps. She glanced up and down the dark curve of the tunnel. There was no one in sight; there was nothing but a string of blue lights glistening on walls of damp granite.

Rearden could not fight the gangs who demanded the laws. The choice was to fight them or to keep his mills open. He had lost his supply of iron ore. He had to fight one battle or the other. There was no time for both.

He had found, on his return, that a scheduled shipment of ore had not been delivered. No word or explanation had been heard from Larkin. When summoned to Rearden's office, Larkin appeared three days later than the appointment made, offering no apology. He said, not looking at Rearden, his mouth drawn tightly into an expression of rancorous dignity:

"After all, you can't order people to come running to your office any time you please."

Rearden spoke slowly and carefully. "Why wasn't the ore delivered?"

"I won't take abuse, I simply won't take any abuse for something I couldn't help. I can run a mine just as well as you ran it, every bit as well. I did everything you did—I don't know why something keeps going wrong unexpectedly all the time. I can't be blamed for the unexpected."

"To whom did you ship your ore last month?"

"I intended to ship you your share of it, I fully intended it, but I couldn't help it if we lost ten days of production last month on account of the rainstorm in the whole of north Minnesota—I intended to ship you the ore, so you can't blame me, because my intention was completely honest."

"If one of my blast furnaces goes down, will I be able to keep it going by feeding your intention into it?"

"That's why nobody can deal with you or talk to you—because you're inhuman."

"I have just learned that for the last three months, you have not been shipping your ore by the lake boats, you have been shipping it by rail. Why?"

"Well, after all, I have a right to run my business as I see fit."

"Why are you willing to pay the extra cost?"

"What do you care? I'm not charging it to you."

"What will you do when you find that you can't afford the rail rates and that you have destroyed the lake shipping?"

"I am sure you wouldn't understand any consideration other than dollars and cents, but some people do consider their social and patriotic responsibilities."

"What responsibilities?"

"Well, I think that a railroad like Taggart Transcontinental is essential to the national welfare and it is one's public duty to support Jim's Minnesota branch line, which is running at a deficit."

Rearden leaned forward across the desk; he was beginning to see the links of a sequence he had never understood. "To whom did you ship your ore last month?" he asked evenly.

"Well, after all, that is my private business which—"

"To Orren Boyle, wasn't it?"

"You can't expect people to sacrifice the entire steel industry of the nation to your selfish interests and—"

"Get out of here," said Rearden. He said it calmly. The sequence was clear to him now.

"Don't misunderstand me, I didn't mean—"

"Get out."

Larkin got out.

Then there followed the days and nights of searching a continent by phone, by wire, by plane—of looking at abandoned mines and at mines ready to be abandoned—of tense, rushed conferences held at tables in the unlighted corners of disreputable restaurants. Looking across the table, Rearden had to decide how much he could risk to invest upon the sole evidence of a man's face, manner and tone of voice, hating the state of having to hope for honesty as for a favor, but risking it, pouring money into unknown hands in exchange for unsupported promises, into unsigned, unrecorded loans to dummy owners of failing mines—money handed and taken furtively, as an exchange between criminals, in anonymous cash, money poured into unenforceable contracts—both parties knowing that in case of fraud, the defrauded was to be punished, not the defrauder—but poured that a stream of ore might continue flowing into furnaces, that the furnaces might continue to pour a stream of white metal.

"Mr. Rearden," asked the purchasing manager of his mills, "if you keep that up, where will be your profit?"

"We'll make it up on tonnage," said Rearden wearily. "We have an unlimited market for Rearden Metal."

The purchasing manager was an elderly man with graying hair, a lean, dry face, and a heart which, people said, was given exclusively to the task of squeezing every last ounce of value out of a penny. He stood in front of Rearden's desk, saying nothing else, merely looking straight at Rearden, his cold eyes narrowed and grim. It was a look of the most profound sympathy that Rearden had ever seen.

There's no other course open, thought Rearden, as he had thought through days and nights. He knew no weapons but to pay for what he wanted, to give value for value, to ask nothing of nature without trading his effort in return, to ask nothing of men without trading the product of his effort. What were the weapons, he thought, if values were not a weapon any longer?

"An unlimited market, Mr. Rearden?" the purchasing manager asked dryly.

Rearden glanced up at him. "I guess I'm not smart enough to make