

"They'll never find him." The smile vanished. "Neither will I." His voice slipped back to the flat, gray tone of duty: "Well, the mills are working, but I'm not. I'm doing nothing but running around the country like a scavenger, searching for illegal ways to purchase raw materials. Hiding, sneaking, lying—just to get a few tons of ore or coal or copper. They haven't lifted their regulations off my raw materials. They know that I'm pouring more Metal than the quotas they give me could produce. They don't care." He added, "They think I do."

"Tired, Hank?"

"Bored to death."

There was a time, she thought, when his mind, his energy, his inexhaustible resourcefulness had been given to the task of a producer devising better ways to deal with nature; *now*, they were switched to the task of a criminal outwitting men. She wondered how long a man could endure a change of that kind.

"It's becoming almost impossible to get iron ore," he said indifferently, then added, his voice suddenly alive, "Now it's going to be completely impossible to get copper." He was grinning.

She wondered how long a man could continue to work against himself, to work when his deepest desire was not to succeed, but to fail.

She understood the connection of his thoughts when he said, "I've never told you, but I've met Ragnar Danneskjold."

"He told me."

"What? Where did you ever—" He stopped. "Of course," he said, his voice tense and low. "He would be one of them. You would have met him. Dagny, what are they like, those men who . . . No. Don't answer me." In a moment he added, "So I've met one of their agents."

"You've met two of them."

His response was a span of total stillness. "Of course," he said dully. "I knew it . . . I just wouldn't admit to myself that I knew . . . He was their recruiting agent, wasn't he?"

"One of their earliest and best."

He chuckled, it was a sound of bitterness and longing. "That night when they got Ken Danagger . . . I thought that they had not sent anyone after me. . . ."

The effort by which he made his face grow rigid, was almost like the slow, resisted turn of a key locking a sunlit room he could not permit himself to examine. After a while, he said impassively, "Dagny, that new rail we discussed last month—I don't think I'll be able to deliver it. They haven't lifted their regulations off my output, they're still controlling my sales and disposing of my Metal as they please. But the bookkeeping is in such a snarl that I'm smuggling a few thousand tons into the black market every week. I think they know it. They're pretending not to. They don't want to antagonize me, right now. But, you see, I've been shipping every ton I could snatch, to some emergency customers of mine. Dagny, I was in Minnesota last month. I've seen what's going on there. The country will starve, not next year, but *this* winter, unless a few of us act and act

fast. There are no grain reserves left anywhere. With Nebraska gone, Oklahoma wrecked, North Dakota abandoned, Kansas barely subsisting—there isn't going to be any wheat this winter, not for the city of New York nor for any Eastern city. Minnesota is our last granary. They've had two bad years in succession, but they have a bumper crop this fall—and they have to be able to harvest it. Have you had a chance to take a look at the condition of the farm-equipment industry? They're not big enough, any of them, to keep a staff of efficient gangsters in Washington or to pay percentages to pull-peddlers. So they haven't been getting many allocations of materials. Two-thirds of them have shut down and the rest are about to. And farms are perishing all over the country—for lack of tools. You should have seen those farmers in Minnesota. They've been spending more time fixing old tractors that can't be fixed than plowing their fields. I don't know how they managed to survive till last spring. I don't know how they managed to plant their wheat. But they did. They did." There was a look of intensity on his face, as if he were contemplating a rare, forgotten sight: a vision of *men*—and she knew what motive was still holding him to his job. "Dagny, they had to have tools for their harvest. I've been selling all the Metal I could steal out of my own mills to the manufacturers of farm equipment. On credit. They've been sending the equipment to Minnesota as fast as they could put it out. Selling it in the same way—illegally and on credit. But they will be paid, this fall, and so will I. Charity, hell! We're helping producers—and what tenacious producers!—not lousy, mooching 'consumers.' We're giving *loans*, not alms. We're supporting *ability*, not *need*. I'll be damned if I'll stand by and let those men be destroyed while the pull-peddlers grow rich!"

He was looking at the image of a sight he had seen in Minnesota: the silhouette of an abandoned factory, with the light of the sunset streaming, unopposed, through the holes of its windows and the cracks of its roof, with the remnant of a sign: Ward Harvester Company.

"Oh, I know," he said. "We'll save them this winter, but the looters will devour them next year. Still, we'll save them this winter. . . . Well, that's why I won't be able to smuggle any rail for you. Not in the immediate future—and there's nothing left to us but the immediate future. I don't know what is the use of feeding a country, if it loses its railroads—but what is the use of railroads where there is no food? What is the use, anyway?"

"It's all right, Hank. We'll last with such rail as we have, for—" She stopped.

"For a month?"

"For the winter—I hope."

Cutting across their silence, a shrill voice reached them from another table, and they turned to look at a man who had the jittery manner of a cornered gangster about to reach for his gun. "An act of anti-social destruction," he was snarling to a sullen companion. "at a time when there's such a desperate shortage of copper! . . . We can't permit it! We can't permit it to be true!"

Rearden turned abruptly to look off, at the city. "I'd give anything