

"Don't listen to her!"

It was so savage a cry of hatred that they drew away from Dr. Robert Stadler, as if he had given voice to the unconfessed within them. His face looked as they feared theirs would look in the privacy of darkness.

"Don't listen to her!" he cried, his eyes avoiding hers, while hers paused on him for a brief, level glance that began as a shock of astonishment and ended as an obituary. "It's your life or his!"

"Keep quiet, Professor," said Mr. Thompson, brushing him off with the jerk of one hand. Mr. Thompson's eyes were watching Dagny, as if some thought were struggling to take shape inside his skull.

"You know the truth, all of you," she said, "and so do I, and so does every man who's heard John Galt! What else are you waiting for? For proof? He's given it to you. For facts? They're all around you. How many corpses do you intend to pile up before you renounce it—your guns, your power, your controls and the whole of your miserable altruistic creed? Give it up, if you want to live. Give it up, if there's anything left in your mind that's still able to want human beings to remain alive on this earth!"

"But it's treason!" cried Eugene Lawson. "She's talking pure treason!"

"Now, now," said Mr. Thompson. "You don't have to go to extremes."

"Huh?" asked Tinky Holloway

"But . . . but surely it's outrageous?" asked Chick Morrison.

"You're not agreeing with her, are you?" asked Wesley Mouch.

"Who's said anything about agreeing?" said Mr. Thompson, his tone surprisingly placid. "Don't be premature. Just don't you be premature, any of you. There's no harm in listening to any argument, is there?"

"That kind of argument?" asked Wesley Mouch, his finger stabbing again and again in Dagny's direction.

"Any kind," said Mr. Thompson placidly. "We mustn't be intolerant."

"But it's treason, ruin, disloyalty, selfishness and big-business propaganda!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. Thompson. "We've got to keep an open mind. We've got to give consideration to every one's viewpoint. She might have something there. *He knows what to do* We've got to be flexible."

"Do you mean that you're willing to quit?" gasped Mouch.

"Now don't jump to conclusions," snapped Mr. Thompson angrily. "If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people who jump to conclusions. And another thing is ivory-tower intellectuals who stick to some pet theory and haven't any sense of practical reality. At a time like this, we've got to be flexible above all."

He saw a look of bewilderment on all the faces around him, on Dagny's and on the others, though not for the same reasons. He smiled, rose to his feet and turned to Dagny.

"Thank you, Miss Taggart," he said. "Thank you for speaking

your mind. That's what I want you to know—that you can trust me and speak to me with full frankness. We're not your enemies, Miss Taggart. Don't pay any attention to the boys—they're upset, but they'll come down to earth. We're not your enemies, nor the country's. Sure, we've made mistakes, we're only human, but we're trying to do our best for the people—that is, I mean, for everybody—in these difficult times. We can't make snap judgments and reach momentous decisions on the spur of the moment, can we? We've got to consider it, and mull it over, and weigh it carefully. I just want you to remember that we're not *anybody's* enemies—you realize that, don't you?"

"I've said everything I had to say," she answered, turning away from him, with no clue to the meaning of his words and no strength to attempt to find it.

She turned to Eddie Willers, who had watched the men around them with a look of so great an indignation that he seemed paralyzed—as if his brain were crying, "It's evil!" and could not move to any further thought. She jerked her head, indicating the door; he followed her obediently.

Dr. Robert Stadler waited until the door had closed after them, then whirled on Mr. Thompson. "You bloody fool! Do you know what you're playing with? Don't you understand that it's life or death? That it's you or him?"

The thin tremor that ran along Mr. Thompson's lips was a smile of contempt. "It's a funny way for a professor to behave. I didn't think professors ever went to pieces."

"Don't you understand? Don't you see that it's one or the other?"

"And what is it that you want me to do?"

"You must kill him."

It was the fact that Dr. Stadler had not cried it, but had said it in a flat, cold, suddenly and fully conscious voice, that brought a chill moment of silence as the whole room's answer.

"You must find him," said Dr. Stadler, his voice cracking and rising once more. "You must leave no stone unturned till you find him and destroy him! If he lives, he'll destroy all of us! If he lives, we can't!"

"How am I to find him?" asked Mr. Thompson, speaking slowly and carefully.

"I . . . I can tell you. I can give you a lead. Watch that Taggart woman. Set your men to watch every move she makes. She'll lead you to him, sooner or later."

"How do you know that?"

"Isn't it obvious? Isn't it sheer chance that she hasn't deserted you long ago? Don't you have the wits to see that she's one of *his* kind?" He did not state what kind.

"Yeah," said Mr. Thompson thoughtfully, "yeah, that's true." He jerked his head up with a smile of satisfaction. "The professor's got something there. Put a tail on Miss Taggart," he ordered, snapping his fingers at Mouch. "Have her tailed day and night. We've got to find him."

"Yes, sir," said Mouch blankly.

"And when you find him," Dr. Stadler asked tensely, "you'll kill him?"

"Kill him, you damn fool? We *need* him!" cried Mr. Thompson.

Mouch waited, but no one ventured the question that was on everyone's mind, so he made the effort to utter stiffly, "I don't understand you, Mr. Thompson."

"Oh, you theoretical intellectuals!" said Mr. Thompson with exasperation. "What are you all gaping at? It's simple. Whoever he is, he's a man of action. Besides, he's got a pressure group: he's cornered all the men of brains. He knows what to do. We'll find him and he'll tell us. He'll tell us what to do. He'll make things work. He'll pull us out of the hole."

"Us, Mr. Thompson?"

"Sure. Never mind your theories. We'll make a deal with him."

"With *him*?"

"Sure. Oh, we'll have to compromise, we'll have to make a few concessions to big business, and the welfare boys won't like it, but what the hell!—do you know any other way out?"

"But his ideas?"

"Mr. Thompson," said Mouch, choking. "I . . . I'm afraid he's a man who's not open to a deal."

"There's no such thing," said Mr. Thompson.

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A cold wind rattled the broken signs over the windows of abandoned shops, in the street outside the radio station. The city seemed abnormally quiet. The distant rumble of the traffic sounded lower than usual and made the wind sound louder. Empty sidewalks stretched off into the darkness: a few lone figures stood in whispering clusters under the rare lights.

Eddie Willers did not speak until they were many blocks away from the station. He stopped abruptly, when they reached a deserted square where the public loud-speakers, which no one had thought of turning off, were now broadcasting a domestic comedy—the shrill voices of a husband and wife quarreling over Junior's dates—to an empty stretch of pavement enclosed by unlighted house fronts. Beyond the square, a few dots of light, scattered vertically above the twenty-fifth-floor limit of the city, suggested a distant, rising form, which was the Taggart Building.

Eddie stopped and pointed at the building, his finger shaking. "Dagny!" he cried, then lowered his voice involuntarily. "Dagny," he whispered. "I know him. He . . . he works there . . . there . . ." He kept pointing at the building with incredulous helplessness. "He works for Taggart Transcontinental . . ."

"I know," she answered; her voice was a lifeless monotone.

"As a track laborer . . . as the lowest of track laborers . . ."

"I know."

"I've talked to him . . . I've been talking to him for years . . . in the Terminal cafeteria . . . He used to ask questions . . . all sorts of questions about the railroad, and I—God, Dagny! was I protecting the railroad or was I helping to destroy it?"

"Both. Neither. It doesn't matter now."