

Ferris cannot help it, if the morons who vote the funds for this Institute insist on what they call results. They are incapable of conceiving of such a thing as abstract science. They can judge it only in terms of the latest gadget it has produced for them. I do not know how Dr. Ferris has managed to keep this Institute in existence. I can only marvel at his practical ability. I don't believe he ever was a first-rate scientist—but what a priceless valet of science! I know that he has been facing a grave problem lately. He's kept me out of it, he spares me all that, but I do hear rumors. People have been criticizing the Institute, because, they say, we have not produced enough. The public has been demanding economy. In times like these, when their fat little comforts are threatened, you may be sure that science is the first thing men will sacrifice. This is the only establishment left. There are practically no private research foundations any longer. Look at the greedy ruffians who run our industries. You cannot expect them to support science."

"Who is supporting you now?" she asked, her voice low.

He shrugged. "Society."

She said, with effort, "You were going to tell me the reasons behind that statement."

"I wouldn't think you'd find them hard to deduce. If you consider that for thirteen years this Institute has had a department of metallurgical research, which has cost over twenty million dollars and has produced nothing but a new silver polish and a new anti-corrosive preparation, which, I believe, is not so good as the old ones—you can imagine what the public reaction will be if some private individual comes out with a product that revolutionizes the entire science of metallurgy and proves to be sensational success!"

Her head dropped. She said nothing.

"I don't blame our metallurgical department!" he said angrily "I know that results of this kind are not a matter of any predictable time. But the public won't understand it. What, then, should we sacrifice? An excellent piece of smelting—or the last center of science left on earth, and the whole future of human knowledge? That is the alternative."

She sat, her head down. After a while, she said, "All right, Dr Stadler. I won't argue."

He saw her groping for her bag, as if she were trying to remember the automatic motions necessary to get up.

"Miss Taggart," he said quietly. It was almost a plea. She looked up. Her face was composed and empty.

He came closer; he leaned with one hand against the wall above her head, almost as if he wished to hold her in the circle of his arm. "Miss Taggart," he said, a tone of gentle, bitter persuasiveness in his voice, "I am older than you. Believe me, there is no other way to live on earth. Men are not open to truth or reason. They cannot be reached by a rational argument. The mind is powerless against them. Yet we have to deal with them. If we want to accomplish anything, we have to deceive them into letting us accomplish it. Or force them. They understand nothing else. We cannot expect their support for any endeavor of the intellect, for any goal of the spirit.

.They are nothing but vicious animals. They are greedy, self-indulgent, predatory dollar-chasers who—”

“I am one of the dollar-chasers, Dr. Stadler,” she said, her voice low.

“You are an unusual, brilliant child who has not seen enough of life to grasp the full measure of human stupidity. I’ve fought it all my life. I’m very tired. . . .” The sincerity of his voice was genuine. He walked slowly away from her. “There was a time when I looked at the tragic mess they’ve made of this earth, and I wanted to cry out, to beg them to listen—I could teach them to live so much better than they did—but there was nobody to hear me, they had nothing to hear me with. . . . Intelligence? It is such a rare, precarious spark that flashes for a moment somewhere among men, and vanishes. One cannot tell its nature, or its future . . . or its death. . . .”

She made a movement to rise.

“Don’t go, Miss Taggart. I’d like you to understand.”

She raised her face to him, in obedient indifference. Her face was not pale, but its planes stood out with strangely naked precision, as if its skin had lost the shadings of color.

“You’re young,” he said. “At your age, I had the same faith in the unlimited power of reason. The same brilliant vision of man as a rational being. I have seen so much, since I have been disillusioned so often. . . . I’d like to tell you just one story.”

He stood at the window of his office. It had grown dark outside. The darkness seemed to rise from the black cut of the river, far below. A few lights trembled in the water, from among the hills of the other shore. The sky was still the intense blue of evening. A lonely star, low over the earth, seemed unnaturally large and made the sky look darker.

“When I was at the Patrick Henry University,” he said, “I had three pupils. I have had many bright students in the past, but these three were the kind of reward a teacher prays for. If ever you could wish to receive the gift of the human mind at its best, young and delivered into your hands for guidance, they were this gift. Theirs was the kind of intelligence one expects to see, in the future, changing the course of the world. They came from very different backgrounds, but they were inseparable friends. They made a strange choice of studies. They majored in two subjects—mine and Hugh Akston’s. Physics and philosophy. It is not a combination of interests one encounters nowadays. Hugh Akston was a distinguished man, a great mind . . . unlike the incredible creature whom that University has now put in his place. . . . Akston and I were a little jealous of each other over these three students. It was a kind of contest between us, a friendly contest, because we understood each other. I heard Akston saying one day that he regarded them as his sons. I resented it a little . . . because I thought of them as mine. . . .”

He turned and looked at her. The bitter lines of age were visible now, cutting across his cheeks. He said, “When I endorsed the establishment of this Institute, one of these three damned me. I have not seen him since. It used to disturb me, in the first few years. I won-