out for a long drive. We went up into pretty wild country, high in the Rockies, and we stopped at a roadside diner. There was a distinguished, gray-haired man behind the counter. I kept staring at him while he fixed our sandwiches and coffee, because I knew that I had seen his face before, but could not remember where. We drove on, we were miles away from the diner, when I remembered. You'd better go there. It's on Route 86, in the mountains, west of Cheyenne, near a small industrial settlement by the Lennox Copper Foundry. It seems strange, but I'm certain of it the cook in that diner is the man I saw at the railroad station with my husband's young idol."

* *

The diner stood on the summit of a long, hard climb. Its glass walls spread a coat of polish over the view of rocks and pines descending in broken ledges to the sunset. It was dark below, but an even, glowing light still remained in the diner, as in a small pool left behind by a receding tide.

Dagny sat at the end of the counter, eating a hamburger sandwich. It was the best-cooked food she had ever tasted, the product of simple ingredients and of an unusual skill. Two workers were finishing their dinner; she was waiting for them to depart.

She studied the man behind the counter. He was slender and tall, he had an air of distinction that belonged to an ancient castle or in the inner office of a bank; but his peculiar quality came from the fact that he made the distinction seem appropriate here, behind the counter of a diner. He wore a cook's white jacket as if it were a full-dress suit. There was an expert competence in his manner of working; his movements were easy, intelligently economical He had a lean face and gray hair that blended in tone with the cold blue of his eyes; somewhere beyond his look of courteous sternness, there was a note of humor, so faint that it vanished if one tried to discern it.

The two workers finished, paid and departed, each leaving a dime for a tip She watched the man as he removed their dishes, put the dimes into the pocket of his white jacket, wiped the counter, working with swift precision. Then he turned and looked at her It was an impersonal glance, not intended to invite conversation; but she felt certain that he had long since noted her New York suit, her high-heeled pumps, her air of being a woman who did not waste her time; his cold, observant eyes seemed to tell her that he knew she did not belong here and that he was waiting to discover her purpose.

"How is business?" she asked.

"Pretty bad. They're going to close the Lennox Foundry next week, so I'll have to close soon, too, and move on." His voice was clear, impersonally cordial.

"Where to?"

"I haven't decided."

"What sort of thing do you have in mind?"

"I don't know. I'm thinking of opening a garage, if I can find the right spot in some town."

"Oh no! You're too good at your job to change it. You shouldn't want to be anything but a cook."

A strange, fine smile moved the curve of his mouth. "No?" he asked courteously.

"No! How would you like a job in New York?" He looked at her, astonished. "I'm serious. I can give you a job on a big railroad, in charge of the dining-car department."

"May I ask why you should want to?"

She raised the hamburger sandwich in its white paper napkin. "There's one of the reasons."

"Thank you. What are the others?"

"I don't suppose you've lived in a big city, or you'd know how miserably difficult it is to find any competent men for any job whatever."

"I know a little about that."

"Well? How about it, then? Would you like a job in New York at ten thousand dollars a year?"

"No."

She had been carried away by the joy of discovering and rewarding ability. She looked at him silently, shocked. "I don't think you understood me," she said.

"I did."

"You're refusing an opportunity of this kind?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"That is a personal matter."

"Why should you work like this, when you can have a better job?"

"I am not looking for a better job."

"You don't want a chance to rise and make money?"

"No. Why do you insist?"

"Because I hate to see ability being wasted!"

He said slowly, intently, "So do I."

Something in the way he said it made her feel the bond of some profound emotion which they held in common, it broke the discipline that forbade her ever to call for help. "I'm so sick of them!" Her voice startled her: it was an involuntary cry. "I'm so hungry for any sight of anyone who's able to do whatever it is he's doing!"

She pressed the back of her hand to her eyes, trying to dam the outbreak of a despair she had not permitted herself to acknowledge: she had not known the extent of it, nor how little of her endurance the quest had left her.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice low. It sounded, not as an apology, but as a statement of compassion.

She glanced up at him. He smiled, and she knew that the smile was intended to break the bond which he, too, had felt: the smile had a trace of courteous mockery. He said, "But I don't believe that you came all the way from New York just to hunt for railroad cooks in the Rockies."

"No. I came for something else." She leaned forward, both forearms braced firmly against the counter, feeling calm and in tight control again, sensing a dangerous adversary. "Did you know, about ten years ago, a young engineer who worked for the Twentieth Century Motor Company?"

She counted the seconds of a pause; she could not define the nature of the way he looked at her, except that it was the look of some special attentiveness.

"Yes, I did," he answered.

"Could you give me his name and address?"

"What for?"

"It's crucially important that I find him."

"That man? Of what importance is he?"

"He is the most important man in the world."

"Really? Why?"

"Did you know anything about his work?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that he hit upon an idea of the most tremendous consequence?"

He let a moment pass. "May I ask who you are?"

"Dagny Taggart. I'm the Vice-Pres--"

"Yes, Miss Taggart. I know who you are."

He said it with impersonal deference. But he looked as if he had found the answer to some special question in his mind and was not astonished any longer.

"Then you know that my interest is not idle," she said. "I'm in a position to give him the chance he needs and I'm prepared to pay anything he asks."

"May I ask what has aroused your interest in him?"

"His motor."

"How did you happen to know about his motor?"

"I found a broken remnant of it in the ruins of the Twentieth Century factory. Not enough to reconstruct it or to learn how it worked. But enough to know that it did work and that it's an invention which can save my railroad, the country and the economy of the whole world. Don't ask me to tell you now what trail I've followed, trying to trace that motor and to find its inventor. That's not of any importance, even my life and work are not of any importance to me right now, nothing is of any importance; except that I must find him. Don't ask me how I happened to come to you. You're the end of the trail. Tell me his name."

He had listened without moving, looking straight at her; the attentiveness of his eyes seemed to take hold of every word and store it carefully away, giving her no clue to his purpose. He did not move for a long time. Then he said, "Give it up, Miss Taggart. You won't find him."

"What is his name?"

"I can tell you nothing about him."

"Is he still alive?"

"I can tell you nothing."

"What is *your* name?"

"Hugh Akston."

Through the blank seconds of recapturing her mind, she kept telling herself: You're hysterical . . . don't be preposterous . . . it's just a coincidence of names—while she knew, in certainty and numb, inexplicable terror, that this was *the* Hugh Akston.