

oddly expectant intensity. "I told you so!" Dr. Ferris was shouting. "I told you so, didn't I? *That's* where you get with your 'peaceful persuasion'!"

She remained standing by the door. They seemed to notice her presence, but they did not seem to care.

"I resign!" yelled Chick Morrison. "I resign! I'm through! I don't know what to say to the country! I can't think! I won't try! It's no use! I couldn't help it! You're not going to blame me! I've resigned!" He waved his arms in some shapeless gesture of futility or farewell, and ran out of the room.

"He has a hide-out all stocked for himself in Tennessee," said Tinky Holloway reflectively, as if he, too, had taken a similar precaution and were now wondering whether the time had come.

"He won't keep it for long, if he gets there at all," said Mouch. "With the gangs of raiders and the state of transportation—" He spread his hands and did not finish.

She knew what thoughts were filling the pause: she knew that no matter what private escapes these men had once provided for themselves, they were now grasping the fact that all of them were trapped.

She observed that there was no terror in their faces; she saw hints of it, but it looked like a perfunctory terror. Their expressions ranged from blank apathy to the relieved look of cheats who had believed that the game could end no other way and were making no effort to contest it or regret it—to the petulant blindness of Lawson, who refused to be conscious of anything—to the peculiar intensity of Jim, whose face suggested a secret smile.

"Well? Well?" Dr. Ferris was asking impatiently, with the crackling energy of a man who feels at home in a world of hysteria. "What are you *now* going to do with him? Argue? Debate? Make speeches?"

No one answered.

"He . . . has . . . to . . . save . . . us," said Mouch slowly, as if straining the last of his mind into blankness and delivering an ultimatum to reality. "He has to . . . take over . . . and save the system."

"Why don't you write him a love letter about it?" said Ferris.

"We've got to . . . *make him* . . . take over . . . We've got to force him to rule," said Mouch in the tone of a sleepwalker.

"*Now*," said Ferris, suddenly dropping his voice, "do you see what a valuable establishment the State Science Institute really is?"

Mouch did not answer him, but she observed that they all seemed to know what he meant.

"You objected to that private research project of mine as 'impractical,'" said Ferris softly. "But what did I tell you?"

Mouch did not answer; he was cracking his knuckles.

"This is no time for squeamishness," James Taggart spoke up with unexpected vigor, but his voice, too, was oddly low. "We don't have to be sissies about it."

"It seems to me . . ." said Mouch dully, "that . . . that the end justifies the means . . ."

"It's too late for any scruples or any principles," said Ferris. "Only direct action can work now."

No one answered; they were acting as if they wished that their pauses, not their words, would state what they were discussing.

"It won't work," said Tinky Holloway. "He won't give in."

"That's what *you* think!" said Ferris, and chuckled. "You haven't seen our experimental model in action. Last month, we got three confessions in three unsolved murder cases."

"If . . ." started Mr. Thompson, and his voice cracked suddenly into a moan, "if he dies, we all perish!"

"Don't worry," said Ferris. "He won't. The Ferris Persuader is safely calculated against that possibility."

Mr. Thompson did not answer.

"It seems to me . . . that we have no other choice . . ." said Mouch; it was almost a whisper.

They remained silent. Mr. Thompson was struggling not to see that they were all looking at him. Then he cried suddenly, "Oh, do anything you want! I couldn't help it! Do anything you want!"

Dr. Ferris turned to Lawson. "Gene," he said tensely, still whispering, "run to the radio-control office. Order all stations to stand by. Tell them that I'll have Mr. Galt on the air within three hours."

Lawson leaped to his feet, with a sudden, mirthful grin, and ran out of the room.

She knew. She knew what they intended doing and what it was within them that made it possible. They did not think that this would succeed. They did not think that Galt would give in; they did not want him to give in. They did not think that anything could save them now; they did not want to be saved. Moved by the panic of their nameless emotions, they had fought against reality all their lives—and now they had reached a moment when at last they felt at home. They did not have to know why they felt it, they who had chosen never to know what they felt—they merely experienced a sense of recognition, since *this* was what they had been seeking, *this* was the kind of reality that had been implied in all of their feelings, their actions, their desires, their choices, their dreams. This was the nature and the method of the rebellion against existence and of the undefined quest for an unnamed Nirvana. They did not want to live; they wanted *him* to die.

The horror she felt was only a brief stab, like the wrench of a switching perspective: she grasped that the objects she had thought to be human were not. She was left with a sense of clarity, of a final answer and of the need to act. He was in danger; there was no time and no room in her consciousness to waste emotion on the actions of the subhuman.

"We must make sure," Wesley Mouch was whispering, "that nobody ever learns about it . . ."

"Nobody will," said Ferris; their voices had the cautious drone of conspirators. "It's a secret, separate unit on the Institute grounds . . . Sound-proofed and safely distant from the rest . . . Only a very few of our staff have ever entered it. . . ."

"If we were to fly—" said Mouch, and stopped abruptly, as if he had caught some warning in Ferris' face.

She saw Ferris' eyes move to her, as if he had suddenly remembered her presence. She held his glance, letting him see the untroubled indifference of hers, as if she had neither cared nor understood. Then, as if merely grasping the signal of a private discussion, she turned slowly, with the suggestion of a shrug, and left the room. She knew that they were now past the stage of worrying about her.

She walked with the same unhurried indifference through the halls and through the exit of the hotel. But a block away, when she had turned a corner, her head flew up and the folds of her evening gown slammed like a sail against her legs with the sudden violence of the speed of her steps.

And now, as she rushed through the darkness, thinking only of finding a telephone booth, she felt a new sensation rising irresistibly within her, past the immediate tension of danger and concern: it was the sense of freedom of a world that had never had to be obstructed.

She saw the wedge of light on the sidewalk, that came from the window of a bar. No one gave her a second glance, as she crossed the half-deserted room: the few customers were still waiting and whispering tensely in front of the crackling blue void of an empty television screen.

Standing in the tight space of the telephone booth, as in the cabin of a ship about to take off for a different planet, she dialed the number OR 6-5693.

The voice that answered at once was Francisco's. "Hello?"

"Francisco?"

"Hello, Dagny. I was expecting you to call."

"Did you hear the broadcast?"

"I did."

"They are now planning to force him to give in." She kept her voice to the tone of a factual report. "They intend to torture him. They have some machine called the Ferris Persuader, in an isolated unit on the grounds of the State Science Institute. It's in New Hampshire. They mentioned flying. They mentioned that they would have him on the radio within three hours."

"I see. Are you calling from a public phone booth?"

"Yes."

"You're still in evening clothes, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Now listen carefully. Go home, change your clothes, pack a few things you'll need, take your jewelry and any valuables that you can carry, take some warm clothing. We won't have time to do it later. Meet me in forty minutes, on the northwest corner, two blocks east of the main entrance of the Taggart Terminal."

"Right."

"So long, Slug."

"So long, Frisco."

She was in the bedroom of her apartment, in less than five minutes, tearing off her evening gown. She left it lying in the middle of the floor, like the discarded uniform of an army she was not serving any