

vice, Inc. Just a puff-ball. Came up out of nothing and went back to it."

"Where are its members?"

"Where are the pieces of a puff-ball when it bursts? Try and trace them all over the United States. Try it."

"Where is Eugene Lawson?"

"Oh, him? He's done all right. He's got a job in Washington—in the Bureau of Economic Planning and National Resources."

Rearden rose too fast, thrown to his feet by a jolt of anger, then said, controlling himself, "Thank you for the information."

"You're welcome, friend, you're welcome," said Mayor Bascom placidly. "I don't know what it is you're after, but take my word for it, give it up. There's nothing more to be had out of that factory."

"I told you that we are looking for a friend of ours."

"Well, have it your way. Must be a pretty good friend, if you'll go to so much trouble to find him, you and the charming lady who is not your wife."

Dagny saw Rearden's face go white, so that even his lips became a sculptured feature, indistinguishable against his skin. "Keep your dirty—" he began, but she stepped between them.

"Why do you think that I am not his wife?" she asked calmly.

Mayor Bascom looked astonished by Rearden's reaction; he had made the remark without malice, merely like a fellow cheat displaying his shrewdness to his partners in guilt.

"Lady, I've seen a lot in my lifetime," he said good-naturedly. "Married people don't look as if they have a bedroom on their minds when they look at each other. In this world, either you're virtuous or you enjoy yourself. Not both, lady, not both."

"I've asked him a question," she said to Rearden in time to silence him. "He's given me an instructive explanation."

"If you want a tip, lady," said Mayor Bascom, "get yourself a wedding ring from the dime store and wear it. It's not sure fire, but it helps."

"Thank you," she said. "Good-bye."

The stern, stressed calm of her manner was a command that made Rearden follow her back to their car in silence.

They were miles beyond the town when he said, not looking at her, his voice desperate and low, "Dagny, Dagny, Dagny . . . I'm sorry!"

"I'm not."

Moments later, when she saw the look of control returning to his face, she said, "Don't ever get angry at a man for stating the truth."

"That particular truth was none of his business."

"His particular estimate of it was none of your concern or mine."

He said through his teeth not as an answer, but as if the single thought battering his brain turned into sounds against his will, "I couldn't protect you from that unspeakable little—"

"I didn't need protection."

He remained silent, not looking at her.

"Hank, when you're able to keep down the anger, tomorrow or next week, give some thought to that man's explanation and see if you recognize any part of it."

He jerked his head to glance at her, but said nothing.

When he spoke, a long time later, it was only to say in a tired, even voice, "We can't call New York and have our engineers come here to search the factory. We can't meet them here. We can't let it be known that we found the motor together. . . . I had forgotten all that . . . up there . . . in the laboratory."

"Let me call Eddie, when we find a telephone. I'll have him send two engineers from the Taggart staff. I'm here alone, on my vacation, for all they'll know or have to know."

They drove two hundred miles before they found a long-distance telephone line. When she called Eddie Willers, he gasped, hearing her voice.

"Dagny! For God's sake, where are you?"

"In Wisconsin. Why?"

"I didn't know where to reach you. You'd better come back at once. As fast as you can."

"What happened?"

"Nothing yet. But there are things going on, which . . . You'd better stop them now, if you can. If anybody can."

"What things?"

"Haven't you been reading the newspapers?"

"No."

"I can't tell you over the phone. I can't give you all the details. Dagny, you'll think I'm insane, but I think they're planning to kill Colorado."

"I'll come back at once," she said.

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Cut into the granite of Manhattan, under the Taggart Terminal, there were tunnels which had once been used as sidings, at a time when traffic ran in clicking currents through every artery of the Terminal every hour of the day. The need for space had shrunk through the years, with the shrinking of the traffic, and the side tunnels had been abandoned, like dry river beds; a few lights remained as blue patches on the granite over rails left to rust on the ground.

Dagny placed the remnant of the motor into a vault in one of the tunnels, the vault had once contained an emergency electric generator, which had been removed long ago. She did not trust the useless young men of the Taggart research staff; there were only two engineers of talent among them who could appreciate her discovery. She had shared her secret with the two and sent them to search the factory in Wisconsin. Then she had hidden the motor where no one else would know of its existence.

When her workers carried the motor down to the vault and departed, she was about to follow them and lock the steel door, but she stopped, key in hand, as if the silence and solitude had suddenly thrown her at the problem she had been facing for days, as if this were the moment to make her decision.

Her office car was waiting for her at one of the Terminal platforms, attached to the end of a train due to leave for Washington in a few minutes. She had made an appointment to see Eugene Lawson, but she had told herself that she would cancel it and postpone her quest—