

"How?"

"By the same method as a mirage on a desert: an image refracted from a layer of heated air."

"How?"

"By a screen of rays calculated against everything—except a courage such as yours."

"What do you mean?"

"I never thought that any plane would attempt to drop within seven hundred feet of the ground. You hit the ray screen. Some of the rays are the kind that kill magnetic motors. Well, that's the second time you beat me: I've never been followed, either."

"Why do you keep that screen?"

"Because this place is private property intended to remain as such."

"What is this place?"

"I'll show it to you, now that you're here, Miss Taggart. I'll answer questions after you've seen it."

She remained silent. She noticed that she had asked questions about every subject, but not about him. It was as if he were a single whole, grasped by her first glance at him, like some irreducible absolute, like an axiom not to be explained any further, as if she knew everything about him by direct perception, and what awaited her now was only the process of identifying her knowledge.

He was carrying her down a narrow trail that went winding to the bottom of the valley. On the slopes around them, the tall, dark pyramids of firs stood immovably straight, in masculine simplicity, like sculpture reduced to an essential form, and they clashed with the complex, feminine, overdetailed lace-work of the birch leaves trembling in the sun. The leaves let the sunrays fall through to sweep across his hair, across both their faces. She could not see what lay below, beyond the turns of the trail.

Her eyes kept coming back to his face. He glanced down at her once in a while. At first, she looked away, as if she had been caught. Then, as if learning it from him, she held his glance whenever he chose to look down—knowing that he knew what she felt and that he did not hide from her the meaning of his glance.

She knew that his silence was the same confession as her own. He did not hold her in the impersonal manner of a man carrying a wounded woman. It was an embrace, even though she felt no suggestion of it in his bearing; she felt it only by means of her certainty that his whole body was aware of holding hers.

She heard the sound of the waterfall before she saw the fragile thread that fell in broken strips of glitter down the ledges. The sound came through some dim beat in her mind, some faint rhythm that seemed no louder than a struggling memory—but they went past and the beat remained, she listened to the sound of the water, but another sound seemed to grow clearer, rising, not in her mind, but from somewhere among the leaves. The trail turned, and in a sudden clearing she saw a small house on a ledge below, with a flash of sun on the pane of an open window. In the moment when she knew what experience had once made her want to surrender to the immediate

present—it had been the night in a dusty coach of the Comet, when she had heard the theme of Halley's Fifth Concerto for the first time—she knew that she was hearing it now, hearing it rise from the keyboard of a piano, in the clear, sharp chords of someone's powerful, confident touch

She snapped the question at his face, as if hoping to catch him unprepared: "That's the Fifth Concerto by Richard Halley, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"When did he write it?"

"Why don't you ask him that in person?"

"Is he here?"

"It's he who's playing it. That's his house."

"Oh . . .!"

"You'll meet him, later. He'll be glad to speak to you. He knows that his works are the only records you like to play, in the evening, when you are alone."

"How does he know that?"

"I told him."

The look on her face was like a question that would have begun with "How in hell . . .?"—but she saw the look of his eyes, and she laughed, her laughter giving sound to the meaning of his glance.

She could not question anything, she thought, she could not doubt, not now—not with the sound of that music rising triumphantly through the sun-drenched leaves, the music of release, of deliverance, played as it was intended to be played, as her mind had struggled to hear it in a rocking coach through the beat of wounded wheels—it was *this* that her mind had seen in the sounds, that night—this valley and the morning sun and—

And then she gasped, because the trail had turned and from the height of an open ledge she saw the town on the floor of the valley.

It was not a town, only a cluster of houses scattered at random from the bottom to the rising steps of the mountains that went on rising above their roofs, enclosing them within an abrupt, impassable circle. They were homes, small and new, with naked, angular shapes and the glitter of broad windows. Far in the distance, some structures seemed taller, and the faint coils of smoke above them suggested an industrial district. But close before her, rising on a slender granite column from a ledge below to the level of her eyes, blinding her by its glare, dimming the rest, stood a dollar sign three feet tall, made of solid gold. It hung in space above the town, as its coat-of-arms, its trademark, its beacon—and it caught the sunrays, like some transmitter of energy that sent them in shining blessing to stretch horizontally through the air above the roofs.

"What's that?" she gasped, pointing at the sign.

"Oh, that's Francisco's private joke."

"Francisco—who?" she whispered, knowing the answer.

"Francisco d'Anconia."

"Is he here, too?"

"He will be, any day now."

"What do you mean, his joke?"

"He gave that sign as an anniversary present to the owner of this

place. And then we all adopted it as our particular emblem. We liked the idea."

"Aren't you the owner of this place?"

"I? No." He glanced down at the foot of the ledge and added, pointing. "There's the owner of this place, coming now."

A car stopped at the end of a dirt road below, and two men were hurrying up the trail. She could not distinguish their faces; one of them was slender and tall, the other shorter, more muscular. She lost sight of them behind the twists of the trail, as he went on carrying her down to meet them.

She met them when they emerged suddenly from behind a rocky corner a few feet away. The sight of their faces hit her with the abruptness of a collision.

"Well, I'll be goddamned!" said the muscular man, whom she did not know, staring at her.

She was staring at the tall, distinguished figure of his companion: it was Hugh Akston.

It was Hugh Akston who spoke first, bowing to her with a courteous smile of welcome. "Miss Taggart, this is the first time anyone has ever proved me wrong. I didn't know--when I told you you'd never find him--that the next time I saw you, you would be in his arms."

"In whose arms?"

"Why, the inventor of the motor."

She gasped, closing her eyes; this was one connection she knew she should have made. When she opened her eyes, she was looking at Galt. He was smiling, faintly, derisively, as if he knew fully what this meant to her.

"It would have served you right if you'd broken your neck!" the muscular man snapped at her, with the anger of concern, almost of affection. "What a stunt to pull--for a person who'd have been admitted here so eagerly, if she'd chosen to come through the front door!"

"Miss Taggart, may I present Midas Mulligan?" said Galt.

"Oh," she said weakly, and laughed; she had no capacity for astonishment any longer. "Do you suppose I was killed in that crash -- and this is some other kind of existence?"

"It is another kind of existence," said Galt. "But as for being killed, doesn't it seem more like the other way around?"

"Oh yes," she whispered, "yes . . ." She smiled at Mulligan. "Where is the front door?"

"Here," he said, pointing to his forehead.

"I've lost the key," she said simply, without resentment. "I've lost all keys, right now."

"You'll find them. But what in blazes were you doing in that plane?"

"Following."

"*Him?*" He pointed at Galt.

"Yes."

"You're lucky to be alive! Are you badly hurt?"

"I don't think so."