

"You'll have a few questions to answer, after they patch you up." He turned brusquely, leading the way down to the car, then glanced at Galt. "Well, what do we do now? *There's* something we hadn't provided for: the first scab."

"The first . . . what?" she asked.

"Skip it," said Mulligan, and looked at Galt. "What do we do?"

"It will be my charge," said Galt. "I will be responsible. You take Quentin Daniels."

"Oh, he's no problem at all. He needs nothing but to get acquainted with the place. He seems to know all the rest."

"Yes. He had practically gone the whole way by himself." He saw her watching him in bewilderment, and said, "There's one thing I must thank you for, Miss Taggart: you did pay me a compliment when you chose Quentin Daniels as my understudy. He was a plausible one."

"Where is he?" she asked. "Will you tell me what happened?"

"Why, Midas met us at the landing field, drove me to my house and took Daniels with him. I was going to join them for breakfast, but I saw your plane spinning and plunging for that pasture. I was the closest one to the scene."

"We got here as fast as we could," said Mulligan. "I thought he deserved to get himself killed--whoever was in that plane. I never dreamed that it was one of the only two persons in the whole world whom I'd exempt."

"Who is the other one?" she asked.

"Hank Rearden."

She winced; it was like a sudden blow from another great distance. She wondered why it seemed to her that Galt was watching her face intently and that she saw an instant's change in his, too brief to define.

They had come to the car. It was a Hammond convertible, its top down, one of the costliest models, some years old, but kept in the shining trim of efficient handling. Galt placed her cautiously in the back seat and held her in the circle of his arm. She felt a stabbing pain once in a while, but she had no attention to spare for it. She watched the distant houses of the town, as Mulligan pressed the starter and the car moved forward as they went past the sign of the dollar and a golden ray hit her eyes, sweeping over her forehead.

"Who is the owner of this place?" she asked.

"I am," said Mulligan.

"What is *he*?" She pointed to Galt.

Mulligan chuckled. "He just works here."

"And you, Dr. Akston?" she asked.

He glanced at Galt. "I'm one of his two fathers, Miss Taggart. The one who didn't betray him."

"Oh!" she said, as another connection fell into place. "Your third pupil?"

"That's right."

"The second assistant bookkeeper!" she moaned suddenly, at one more memory.

"What's that?"

"That's what Dr. Stadler called him. That's what Dr. Stadler told me he thought this third pupil had become."

"He overestimated," said Galt. "I'm much lower than that by the scale of his standards and of his world."

The car had swerved into a lane rising toward a lonely house that stood on a ridge above the valley. She saw a man walking down a path, ahead of them, hastening in the direction of the town. He wore blue denim overalls and carried a lunchbox. There was something faintly familiar in the swift abruptness of his gait. As the car went past him, she caught a glimpse of his face—and she jerked backward, her voice rising to a scream from the pain of the movement and from the shock of the sight: "Oh, stop! Stop! Don't let him go!" It was Ellis Wyatt.

The three men laughed, but Mulligan stopped the car. "Oh . . ." she said weakly, in apology, realizing she had forgotten that this was the place from which Wyatt would not vanish.

Wyatt was running toward them: he had recognized her, too. When he seized the edge of the car, to brake his speed, she saw the face and the young, triumphant smile that she had seen but once before: on the platform of Wyatt Junction.

"Dagny! You, too, at last? One of us?"

"No," said Galt. "Miss Taggart is a castaway."

"What?"

"Miss Taggart's plane crashed. Didn't you see it?"

"Crashed—*here*?"

"Yes."

"I heard a plane, but I . . ." His look of bewilderment changed to a smile, regretful, amused and friendly. "I see. Oh, hell, Dagny, it's preposterous!"

She was staring at him helplessly, unable to reconnect the past to the present. And helplessly—as one would say to a dead friend, in a dream, the words one regrets having missed the chance to say in life—she said, with the memory of a telephone ringing, unanswered, almost two years ago, the words she had hoped to say if she ever caught sight of him again, "I . . . I tried to reach you."

He smiled gently. "We've been trying to reach you ever since, Dagny. . . . I'll see you tonight. Don't worry, I won't vanish—and I don't think you will, either."

He waved to the others and went off, swinging his lunchbox. She glanced up, as Mulligan started the car, and saw Galt's eyes watching her attentively. Her face hardened, as if in open admission of pain and in defiance of the satisfaction it might give him. "All right," she said. "I see what sort of show you want to put me through the shock of witnessing."

But there was neither cruelty nor pity in his face, only the level look of justice. "Our first rule here, Miss Taggart," he answered, "is that one must always see for oneself."

The car stopped in front of the lonely house. It was built of rough granite blocks, with a sheet of glass for most of its front wall. "I'll send the doctor over," said Mulligan, driving off, while Galt carried her up the path.

"Your house?" she asked.

"Mine," he answered, kicking the door open.

He carried her across the threshold into the glistening space of his living room, where shafts of sunlight hit walls of polished pine. She saw a few pieces of furniture made by hand, a ceiling of bare rafters, an archway open upon a small kitchen with rough shelves, a bare wooden table and the astonishing sight of chromium glittering on an electric stove; the place had the primitive simplicity of a frontiersman's cabin, reduced to essential necessities, but reduced with a super-modern skill.

He carried her across the sunrays into a small guest room and placed her down on a bed. She noticed a window open upon a long slant of rocky steps and pines going off into the sky. She noticed small streaks that looked like inscriptions cut into the wood of the walls, a few scattered lines that seemed made by different handwritings; she could not distinguish the words. She noticed another door, left half-open; it led to his bedroom.

"Am I a guest here or a prisoner?" she asked.

"The choice will be yours, Miss Taggart."

"I can make no choice when I'm dealing with a stranger."

"But you're not. Didn't you name a railroad line after me?"

"Oh! . . . Yes . . ." It was the small jolt of another connection falling into place. "Yes, I—" She was looking at the tall figure with the sun-streaked hair, with the suppressed smile in the mercilessly perceptive eyes—she was seeing the struggle to build her Line and the summer day of the first train's run—she was thinking that if a human figure could be fashioned as an emblem of that Line, *this* was the figure. "Yes . . . I did . . ." Then, remembering the rest she added, "But I named it after an enemy."

He smiled. "That's the contradiction you had to resolve sooner or later Miss Taggart."

"It was you . . . wasn't it? . . . who destroyed my Line. . . ."

"Why, no. It was the contradiction."

She closed her eyes, in a moment, she asked, "All those stories I heard about you—which of them are true?"

"All of them."

"Was it you who spread them?"

"No. What for? I never had any wish to be talked about."

"But you: do know that you've become a legend?"

"Yes."

"The young inventor of the Twentieth Century Motor Company is the one real version of the legend, isn't it?"

"The one that's concretely real—yes."

She could not say it indifferently; there was still a breathless tone and the drop of her voice, toward a whisper, when she asked, "The motor . . . the motor I found . . . it was *you* who made it?"

"Yes."

She could not prevent the jolt of eagerness that threw her head up. "The secret of transforming energy—" she began, and stopped.

"I could tell it to you in fifteen minutes," he said, in answer to the desperate plea she had not uttered, "but there's no power on