ined it or whether there had been something strange in the girl's voice: it had sounded unnaturally tense.

She felt the faint light-headedness of hunger and thought that she should go down to get a cup of coffee, but there was still the report of the chief engineer to finish, so she lighted one more cigarette.

The chief engineer was out on the road, supervising the reconstruction of the main track with the Rearden Metal rail taken from the corpse of the John Galt Line; she had chosen the sections most urgently in need of repair. Opening his report, she read—with a shock of incredulous anger—that he had stopped work in the mountain section of Winston, Colorado. He recommended a change of plans: he suggested that the rail intended for Winston be used, instead, to repair the track of their Washington-to-Miami branch. He gave his reasons: a derailment had occurred on that branch last week, and Mr. Tinky Holloway of Washington, traveling with a party of friends, had been delayed for three hours; it had been reported to the chief engineer that Mr. Holloway had expressed extreme displeasure. Although, from a purely technological viewpoint--said the chief engineer's report—the rail of the Miami branch was in better condition than that of the Winston section, one had to remember, from a sociological viewpoint, that the Miami branch carried a much more important class of passenger traffic; therefore, the chief engineer suggested that Winston could be kept waiting a little longer, and recommended the sacrifice of an obscure section of mountain trackage for the sake of a branch where "Taggart Transcontinental could not afford to create an unfavorable impression."

She read, slashing furious pencil marks on the margins of the pages, thinking that her first duty of the day, ahead of any other, was to stop this particular piece of insanity

The telephone rang.

"Yes?" she asked, snatching the receiver. "McNeil Car Foundry?"

"No," said the voice of her secretary. "Señor Francisco d'Anconia."

She looked at the phone's mouthpiece for the instant of a brief shock. "All right. Put him on."

The next voice she heard was Francisco's. "I see that you're in your office just the same," he said; his voice was mocking, harsh and tense.

"Where did you expect me to be?"

"How do you like the new suspension?"

"What suspension?"

"The moratorium on brains."

"What are you talking about?"

"Haven't you seen today's newspapers?"

"No."

There was a pause; then his voice came slowly, changed and grave: "Better take a look at them, Dagny."

"All right."

"I'll call you later."

She hung up and pressed the switch of the communicator on her desk. "Get me a newspaper," she said to her secretary

"Yes, Miss Taggart," the secretary's voice answered grimly.

It was Eddie Willers who came in and put the newspaper down on her desk. The meaning of the look on his face was the same as the tone she had caught in Francisco's voice: the advance notice of some inconceivable disaster.

"None of us wanted to be first to tell you," he said very quietly and walked out.

When she rose from her desk, a few moments later, she felt that she had full control of her body and that she was not aware of her body's existence. She felt lifted to her feet and it seemed to her that she stood straight, not touching the ground. There was an abnormal clarity about every object in the room; yet she was seeing nothing around her, but she knew that she would be able to see the thread of a cobweb if her purpose required it, just as she would be able to walk with a somnambulist's assurance along the edge of a roof. She could not know that she was looking at the room with the eyes of a person who had lost the capacity and the concept of doubt, and what remained to her was the simplicity of a single perception and of a single goal. She did not know that the thing which seemed so violent, yet felt like such a still, unfamiliar calm within her, was the power of full certainty—and that the anger shaking her body, the anger which made her ready, with the same passionate indifference, either to kill or to die, was her love of rectitude, the only love to which all the years of her life had been given.

Holding the newspaper in her hand, she walked out of her office and on toward the hall. She knew, crossing the anteroom, that the faces of her staff were turned to her, but they seemed to be many years away.

She walked down the hall, moving swiftly but without effort, with the same sensation of knowing that her feet were probably touching the ground but that she did not feel it. She did not know how many rooms she crossed to reach Jim's office, or whether there had been any people in her way, she knew the direction to take and the door to pull open to enter unannounced and walk toward his desk.

The newspaper was twisted into a roll by the time she stood before him. She threw it at his face, it struck his cheek and fell down to the carpet.

"There's my resignation, Jim," she said. "I won't work as a slave or as a slave-driver."

She did not hear the sound of his gasp; it came with the sound of the door closing after her.

She went back to her office and, crossing the anteroom, signaled Eddie to follow her inside.

She said, her voice calm and clear, "I have resigned."

He nodded silently.

"I don't know as yet what I'll do in the future. I'm going away, to think it over and to decide. If you want to follow me, I'll be at the lodge in Woodstock." It was an old hunting cabin in a forest of the Berkshire Mountains, which she had inherited from her father and had not visited for years.

"I want to follow," he whispered, "I want to quit, and . . . and I can't. I can't make myself do it."

"Then will you do me a favor?"

"Of course."

"Don't communicate with me about the railroad. I don't want to hear it. Don't tell anyone where I am, except Hank Rearden. If he asks, tell him about the cabin and how to get there. But no one else. I don't want to see anybody."

"All right."

"Promise?"

"Of course."

"When I decide what's to become of me, I'll let you know."

"I'll wait."

"That's all Eddie."

He knew that every word was measured and that nothing else could be said between them at this moment. He inclined his head, letting it say the rest, then walked out of the office.

She saw the chief engineer's report still lying open on her desk, and thought that she had to order him at once to resume work on the Winston section, then remembered that it was not her problem any longer. She felt no pain. She knew that the pain would come later and that it would be a tearing agony of pain, and that the numbness of this moment was a rest granted to her, not after, but before, to make her ready to bear it. But it did not matter. If that is required of me, then I'll bear it—she thought.

She sat down at her desk and telephoned Rearden at his mills in Pennsylvania.

"Hello, dearest," he said. He said it simply and clearly, as if he wanted to say it because it was real and right, and he needed to hold on to the concepts of reality and rightness.

"Hank, I've quit."

"I see." He sounded as if he had expected it.

"Nobody came to get me, no destroyer, perhaps there never was any destroyer, after all. I don't know what I'll do next, but I have to get away, so that I won't have to see any of them for a while. Then I'll decide. I know that you can't go with me right now."

"No. I have two weeks in which they expect me to sign their Gift Certificate. I want to be right here when the two weeks expire."

"Do you need me—for the two weeks?"

"No. It's worse for you than for me. You have no way to fight them. I have. I think I'm glad they did it. It's clear and final. Don't worry about me. Rest. Rest from all of it, first."

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"To the country. To a cabin I own in the Berkshires. If you want to see me, Eddie Willers will tell you the way to get there. I'll be back in two weeks."

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Yes."

"Don't come back until I come for you."

"But I want to be here, when it happens."