

him up, and those who represented a back bent to let him climb. By the unwritten code of the day, nobody received or accepted an invitation from a man of public prominence except in token of one or the other of these motives. Those in the first group were, for the most part, youthful; they had come from Washington. Those in the second group were older; they were businessmen.

Orren Boyle and Bertram Scudder were men who used words as a public instrument, to be avoided in the privacy of one's own mind. Words were a commitment, carrying implications which they did not wish to face. They needed no words for their chart; the classification was done by physical means: a respectful movement of their eyebrows, equivalent to the emotion of the word "So!" for the first group—and a sarcastic movement of their lips, equivalent to the emotion of "Well, well!" for the second. One face blew up the smooth working of their calculating mechanisms for a moment: when they saw the cold blue eyes and blond hair of Hank Rearden, their muscles tore at the register of the second group in the equivalent of "Oh, boy!" The sum of the chart was an estimate of James Taggart's power. It added up to an impressive total.

They knew that James Taggart was fully aware of it when they saw him moving among his guests. He walked briskly, in a Morse code pattern of short dashes and brief stops, with a manner of faint irritation, as if conscious of the number of people whom his displeasure might worry. The hint of a smile on his face had a flavor of gloating—as if he knew that the act of coming to honor him was an act that disgraced the men who had come: as if he knew and enjoyed it.

A tail of figures kept trailing and shifting behind him, as if their function were to give him the pleasure of ignoring them. Mr. Mowen flickered briefly among the tail, and Dr. Pritchett, and Ralph Eubank. The most persistent one was Paul Larkin. He kept describing circles around Taggart, as if trying to acquire a suntan by means of an occasional ray, his wistful smile pleading to be noticed.

Taggart's eyes swept over the crowd once in a while, swiftly and furtively, in the manner of a prowler's flashlight, this, in the muscular shorthand legible to Orren Boyle, meant that Taggart was looking for someone and did not want anyone to know it. The search ended when Eugene Lawson came to shake Taggart's hand and to say, his wet lower lip twisting like a cushion to soften the blow, "Mr. Mouch couldn't come, Jim. Mr. Mouch is so sorry, he had a special plane chartered, but at the last minute things came up, crucial national problems, you know." Taggart stood still, did not answer and frowned.

Orren Boyle burst out laughing. Taggart turned to him so sharply that the others melted away without waiting for a command to vanish.

"What do you think you're doing?" snapped Taggart.

"Having a good time, Jimmy, just having a good time," said Boyle. "Wesley is *your* boy, wasn't he?"

"I know somebody who's my boy and he'd better not forget it."

"Who? Larkin? Well, no, I don't think you're talking about Lar-

kin. And if it's not Larkin that you're talking about, why then I think you ought to be careful in your use of the possessive pronouns. I don't mind the age classification, I know I look young for my years, but I'm just allergic to pronouns."

"That's very smart, but you're going to get too smart one of these days."

"If I do, you just go ahead and make the most of it, Jimmy. *If*."

"The trouble with people who overreach themselves is that they have short memories. You'd better remember who got Rearden Metal choked off the market for you."

"Why, I remember who promised to. That was the party who then pulled every string he could lay his hands on to try to prevent that particular directive from being issued, because he figured he might need rail of Rearden Metal in the future."

"Because *you* spent ten thousand dollars pouring liquor into people you hoped would prevent the directive about the bond moratorium!"

"That's right. So I did. I had friends who had railroad bonds. And besides, I have friends in Washington, too, Jimmy. Well, your friends beat mine on that moratorium business, but mine beat yours on Rearden Metal—and I'm not forgetting it. But what the hell!—it's all right with me, that's the way to share things around, only don't you try to fool *me*, Jimmy. Save the act for the suckers."

"If you don't believe that I've always tried to do my best for you—"

"Sure, you have. The best that could be expected, all things considered. And you'll continue to do it, too, so long as I've got somebody you need—and not a minute longer. So I just wanted to remind you that I've got my own friends in Washington. Friends that money can't buy—just like yours, Jimmy."

"What do you think you mean?"

"Just what you're thinking. The ones you buy aren't really worth a damn, because somebody can always offer them more, so the field's wide open to anybody and it's just like old-fashioned competition again. But if you get the goods on a man, then you've got him, then there's no higher bidder and you can count on his friendship. Well, you have friends, and so have I. You have friends I can use, and vice versa. That's all right with me—what the hell!—one's got to trade something. If we don't trade money—and the age of money is past—then we trade men."

"What is it you're driving at?"

"Why, I'm just telling you a few things that you ought to remember. Now take Wesley, for instance. You promised him the assistant's job in the Bureau of National Planning—for double-crossing Rearden, at the time of the Equalization of Opportunity Bill. You had the connections to do it, and that's what I asked you to do—in exchange for the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule, where I had the connections. So Wesley did his part, and you saw to it that you got it all on paper—oh sure, I know that you've got written proof of the kind of deals he pulled to help pass that bill, while he was taking Rearden's money to defeat it and keeping Rearden off guard. They were