"Who the hell is Mr. Wesley Mouch?"

Dr. Ferris smiled. "In another year even you won't ask that question, Dr. Stadler. Let us put it this way: Mr. Mouch is the man who is rationing oil—for the time being."

"Then I suggest that you stick to your job. Deal with Mr. Mouch and leave him the realm of oil furnaces, but leave the realm of ideas to me."

"It would be curious to try to formulate the line of demarcation," said Dr. Ferris, in the tone of an idle academic remark. "But if we're talking about my book, why, then we're talking about the realm of public relations." He turned to point solicitously at the mathematical formulas chalked on the blackboard. "Dr. Stadler, it would be disastrous if you allowed the realm of public relations to distract you from the work which you alone on earth are capable of doing."

It was said with obsequious deference, and Dr. Stadler could not tell what made him hear in it the sentence: "Stick to your blackboard!" He felt a biting irritation and he switched it against himself, thinking angrily that he had to get rid of these suspicions.

"Public relations?" he said contemptuously. "I don't see any practical purpose in your book. I don't see what it's intended to accomplish."

"Don't you?" Dr. Ferris' eyes flickered briefly to his face; the sparkle of insolence was too swift to be identified with certainty.

"I cannot permit myself to consider certain things as possible in a civilized society," Dr Stadler said sternly.

"That is admirably exact," said Dr. Ferris cheerfully. "You cannot permit yourself."

Dr. Ferris rose, being first to indicate that the interview was ended. "Please call for me whenever anything occurs in this Institute to cause you discomfort, Dr. Stadler," he said. "It is my privilege always to be at your service."

Knowing that he had to assert his authority, smothering the shameful realization of the sort of substitute he was choosing, Dr. Stadler said imperiously, in a tone of sarcastic rudeness, "The next time I call for you, you'd better do something about that car of yours."

"Yes, Dr. Stadler, I shall make certain never to be late again, and I beg you to forgive me." Dr. Ferris responded as if playing a part on cue; as if he were pleased that Dr. Stadler had learned, at last, the modern method of communication. "My car has been causing me a great deal of trouble, it's falling to pieces, and I had ordered a new one some time ago, the best one on the market, a Hammond convertible—but Lawrence Hammond went out of business last week, without reason or warning, so now I'm stuck. Those bastards seem to be vanishing somewhere. Something will have to be done about it."

When Ferris had gone, Dr. Stadler sat at his desk, his shoulders shrinking together, conscious only of a desperate wish not to be seen by anyone. In the fog of the pain which he would not define, there was also the desperate feeling that no one—no one of those he valued—would ever wish to see him again.

He knew the words which he had not uttered. He had not said

that he would denounce the book in public and repudiate it in the name of the Institute. He had not said it, because he had been afraid to discover that the threat would leave Ferris unmoved, that Ferris was safe, that the word of Dr. Robert Stadler had no power any longer. And while he told himself that he would consider later the question of making a public protest, he knew that he would not make it.

He picked up the book and let it drop into the wastebasket

A face came to his mind, suddenly and clearly, as if he were seeing the purity of its every line, a young face he had not permitted himself to recall for years. He thought: No, he has not read this book, he won't see it, he's dead, he must have died long ago . . . The sharp pain was the shock of discovering simultaneously that this was the man he longed to see more than any other being in the world—and that he had to hope that this man was dead.

He did not know why—when the telephone rang and his secretary told him that Miss Dagny Taggart was on the line—why he seized the receiver with eagerness and noticed that his hand was trembling. She would never want to see him again, he had thought for over a year. He heard her clear, impersonal voice asking for an appointment to see him. "Yes, Miss Taggart, certainly, yes, indeed. . . . Monday morning? Yes—look, Miss Taggart, I have an engagement in New York today, I could drop in at your office this afternoon, if you wish. . . . No, no—no trouble at all, I'll be delighted. . . . This afternoon, Miss Taggart, about two—I mean, about four o'clock."

He had no engagement in New York. He did not give himself time to know what had prompted him to do it. He was smiling eagerly, looking at a patch of sunlight on a distant hill

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Dagny drew a black line across Train Number 93 on the schedule, and felt a moment's desolate satisfaction in noting that she did it calmly. It was an action which she had had to perform many times in the last six months. It had been hard, at first; it was becoming easier. The day would come, she thought, when she would be able to deliver that death stroke even without the small salute of an effort. Train Number 93 was a freight that had earned its living by carrying supplies to Hammondsville, Colorado.

She knew what steps would come next: first, the death of the special freights—then the shrinking in the number of boxcars for Hammondsville, attached, like poor relatives, to the rear end of freights bound for other towns—then the gradual cutting of the stops at Hammondsville Station from the schedules of the passenger trains—then the day when she would strike Hammondsville, Colorado, off the map. That had been the progression of Wyatt Junction and of the town called Stockton.

She knew—once word was received that Lawrence Hammond had retired—that it was useless to wait, to hope and to wonder whether his cousin, his lawyer or a committee of local citizens would reopen the plant. She knew it was time to start cutting the schedules.

It had lasted less than six months after Ellis Wyatt had gone—that period which a columnist had gleefully called "the field day of