struggle—this was what he wished to assert and, alone with her in the half-darkness high in space above a city of ruins, to hold as the last of his property.

Afterwards, they lay still, his face on her shoulder. The reflection of a distant electric sign kept beating in faint flashes on the ceiling above her head.

He reached for her hand and slipped her fingers under his face to let his mouth rest against her palm for a moment, so gently that she felt his motive more than his touch.

After a while, she got up, she reached for a cigarette, lighted it, then held it out to him with a slight, questioning lift of her hand; he nodded, still sitting half-stretched on the couch; she placed the cigarette between his lips and lighted another for herself. She felt a great sense of peace between them, and the intimacy of the unimportant gestures underscored the importance of the things they were not saying to each other. Everything was said, she thought—but knew that it waited to be acknowledged.

She saw his eyes move to the entrance door once in a while and remain on it for long moments, as if he were still seeing the man who had left.

He said quietly, "He could have beaten me by letting me have the truth, any time he wished. Why didn't he?"

She shrugged, spreading her hands in a gesture of helpless sadness, because they both knew the answer. She asked, "He did mean a great deal to you, didn't he?"

"He does."

The two dots of fire at the tips of their cigarettes had moved slowly to the tips of their fingers, with the small glow of an occasional flare and the soft crumbling of ashes as sole movement in the silence, when the doorbell rang. They knew that it was not the man they wished but could not hope to see return, and she frowned with sudden anger as she went to open the door. It took her a moment to remember that the innocuously courteous figure she saw bowing to her with a standard smile of welcome was the assistant manager of the apartment house.

"Good evening, Miss Taggart. We're so glad to see you back. I just came on duty and heard that you had returned and wanted to greet you in person."

"Thank you." She stood at the door, not moving to admit him.

"I have a letter that came for you about a week ago, Miss Taggart," he said, reaching into his pocket. "It looked as if it might be important, but being marked 'personal,' it was obviously not intended to be sent to your office and, besides, they did not know your address, either—so not knowing where to forward it, I kept it in our safe and I thought I'd deliver it to you in person."

The envelope he handed to her was marked: Registered—Air Mail—Special Delivery—Personal. The return address said: Quentin Daniels, Utah Institute of Technology, Afton, Utah.

"Oh . . . Thank you."

The assistant manager noted that her voice went dropping toward a whisper, the polite disguise for a gasp, he noted that she stood

looking down at the sender's name much longer than was necessary, so he repeated his good wishes and departed.

She was tearing the envelope open as she walked toward Rearden, and she stopped in the middle of the room to read the letter. It was typewritten on thin paper—he could see the black rectangles of the paragraphs through the transparent sheets—and he could see her face as she read them.

He expected it, by the time he saw her come to the end: she leaped to the telephone, he heard the violent whirl of the dial and her voice saying with trembling urgency, "Long-distance, please . . . Operator, get me the Utah Institute of Technology at Afton, Utah!"

He asked, approaching, "What is it?"

She extended the letter, not looking at him, her eyes fixed on the telephone, as if she could force it to answer.

The letter said:

Dear Miss Taggart:

I have fought it out for three weeks, I did not want to do it, I know how this will hit you and I know every argument you could offer me, because I have used them all against myself—but this is to tell you that I am quitting.

I cannot work under the terms of Directive 10-289—though not for the reasons its perpetrators intended. I know that their abolition of all scientific research does not mean a damn to you or me, and that you would want me to continue. But I have to quit, because I do not wish to succeed any longer.

I do not wish to work in a world that regards me as a slave. I do not wish to be of any value to people. If I succeeded in rebuilding the motor, I would not let you place it in their service. I would not take it upon my conscience that anything produced by my mind should be used to bring them comfort.

I know that if we succeed, they will be only too eager to expropriate the motor. And for the sake of that prospect, we have to accept the position of criminals, you and I, and live under the threat of being arrested at any moment at their whim. And *this* is the thing that I cannot take, even were I able to take all the rest: that in order to give them an inestimable benefit, we should be made martyrs to the men who, but for us, could not have conceived of it. I might have forgiven the rest, but when I think of this, I say: May they be damned, I will see them all die of starvation, myself included, rather than forgive them for this or permit it!

To tell you the full truth, I want to succeed, to solve the secret of the motor, as much as ever. So I shall continue to work on it for my own sole pleasure and for as long as I last. But if I solve it, it will remain my private secret. I will not release it for any commercial use. Therefore, I cannot take your money any longer. Commercialism is supposed

to be despicable, so all those people should truly approve of my decision. and I—I'm tired of helping those who despise me.

I don't know how long I will last or what I will do in the future. For the moment, I intend to remain in my job at this Institute. But if any of its trustees or receivers should remind me that I am now legally forbidden to cease being a janitor, I will quit.

You had given me my greatest chance and if I am now giving you a painful blow, perhaps I should ask you to forgive me. I think that you love your work—as much as I loved mine, so you will know that my decision was not easy to make, but that I had to make it.

It is a strange feeling—writing this letter. I do not intend to die, but I am giving up the world and this feels like the letter of a suicide. So I want to say that of all the people I have known, you are the only person I regret leaving behind.

Sincerely yours,
Quentin Daniels

When he looked up from the letter, he heard her saying, as he had heard her through the words of the typewritten lines, her voice rising closer to despair each time:

"Keep ringing, Operator! . . . Please keep ringing!"

"What can you tell him?" he asked. "There are no arguments to offer."

"I won't have a chance to tell him! He's gone by now. It was a week ago. I'm sure he's gone. They've got him."

"Who got him?"

"Yes, Operator, I'll hold the line, keep trying!"

"What would you tell him if he answered?"

"I'd beg him to go on taking my money, with no strings attached, no conditions, just so he'll have the means to continue! I'll promise him that if we're still in a looters' world when and if he succeeds, I won't ask him to give me the motor or even to tell me its secret But if, by that time, we're free—" She stopped.

"If we're free . . ."

"All I want from him now is that he doesn't give up and vanish, like . . like all those others. I don't want to let them get him If it's not too late—oh God, I don't want them to get him! . . . Yes, Operator, keep ringing!"

"What good will it do us, even if he continues to work?"

"That's all I'll beg him to do—just to continue. Maybe we'll never get a chance to use the motor in the future. But I want to know that somewhere in the world there's still a great brain at work on a great attempt—and that we still have a chance at a future. . . . If that motor is abandoned *again*, then there's nothing but Starnesville ahead of us."

"Yes. I know."