

"What did you do, when you walked out of the Twentieth Century?" she asked.

"I went out to become a flame-spotter. I made it my job to watch for those bright flares in the growing night of savagery, which were the men of ability, the men of the mind—to watch their course, their struggle and their agony—and to pull them out, when I knew that they had seen enough."

"What did you tell them to make them abandon everything?"

"I told them that they were right."

In answer to the silent question of her glance, he added, "I gave them the pride they did not know they had. I gave them the words to identify it. I gave them that priceless possession which they had missed, had longed for, yet had not known they needed: a moral sanction. Did you call me the destroyer and the hunter of men? I was the walking delegate of this strike, the leader of the victims' rebellion, the defender of the oppressed, the disinherited, the exploited—and when I use these words, they have, for once, a literal meaning."

"Who were the first to follow you?"

He let a moment pass, in deliberate emphasis, then answered, "My two best friends. You know one of them. You know, perhaps better than anyone else, what price he paid for it. Our own teacher. Dr. Akston, was next. He joined us within one evening's conversation. William Hastings, who had been my boss in the research laboratory of Twentieth Century Motors, had a hard time, fighting it out with himself. It took him a year. But he joined. Then Richard Halley. Then Midas Mulligan."

"—who took fifteen minutes," said Mulligan.

She turned to him "It was you who established this valley?"

"Yes," said Mulligan. "It was just my own private retreat, at first. I bought it years ago. I bought miles of these mountains, section by section, from ranchers and cattlemen who didn't know what they owned. The valley is not listed on any map. I built this house, when I decided to quit. I cut off all possible avenues of approach, except one road—and it's camouflaged beyond anyone's power to discover—and I stocked this place to be self-supporting, so that I could live here for the rest of my life and never have to see the face of a looter. When I heard that John had got Judge Narragansett, too, I invited the Judge to come here. Then we asked Richard Halley to join us. The others remained outside, at first."

"We had no rules of any kind," said Galt, "except one. When a man took our oath, it meant a single commitment: not to work in his own profession, not to give to the world the benefit of his mind. Each of us carried it out in any manner he chose. Those who had money, retired to live on their savings. Those who had to work, took the lowest jobs they could find. Some of us had been famous; others—like that young brakeman of yours, whom Halley discovered—were stopped by us before they had set out to get tortured. But we did not give up our minds or the work we loved. Each of us continued in his real profession, in whatever manner and spare time he could manage—but he did it secretly, for his own sole benefit, giving nothing to men, sharing nothing. We were scattered all over the country, as the

outcasts we had always been, only now we accepted our parts with conscious intention. Our sole relief were the rare occasions when we could see one another. We found that we liked to meet—in order to be reminded that human beings still existed. So we came to set aside one month a year to spend in this valley—to rest, to live in a rational world, to bring our real work out of hiding, to trade our achievements—here, where achievements meant payment, not expropriation. Each of us built his own house here, at his own expense—for one month of life out of twelve. It made the eleven easier to bear.”

“You see, Miss Taggart,” said Hugh Akston, “man is a social being, but not in the way the looters preach.”

“It’s the destruction of Colorado that started the growth of this valley,” said Midas Mulligan. “Ellis Wyatt and the others came to live here permanently, because they had to hide. Whatever part of their wealth they could salvage, they converted into gold or machines, as I had, and they brought it here. There were enough of us to develop the place and to create jobs for those who had had to earn their living outside. We have now reached the stage where most of us can live here full time. The valley is almost self-supporting—and as to the goods that we can’t yet produce, I purchase them from the outside through a pipe line of my own. It’s a special agent, a man who does not let my money reach the looters. We are not a state here, not a society of any kind—we’re just a voluntary association of men held together by nothing but every man’s self-interest. I own the valley and I sell the land to the others, when they want it. Judge Narragansett is to act as our arbiter, in case of disagreements. He hasn’t had to be called upon, as yet. They say that it’s hard for men to agree. You’d be surprised how easy it is—when both parties hold as their moral absolute that neither exists for the sake of the other and that reason is their only means of trade. The time is approaching when all of us will have to be called to live here—because the world is falling apart so fast that it will soon be starving. But we will be able to support ourselves in this valley.”

“The world is crashing faster than we expected,” said Hugh Akston. “Men are stopping and giving up. Your frozen trains, the gangs of raiders, the deserters, they’re men who’ve never heard of us, and they’re not part of our strike, they are acting on their own—it’s the natural response of whatever rationality is still left in them—it’s the same kind of protest as ours.”

“We started with no time limit in view,” said Galt. “We did not know whether we’d live to see the liberation of the world or whether we’d have to leave our battle and our secret to the next generations. We knew only that this was the only way we cared to live. But now we think that we will see, and soon, the day of our victory and of our return.”

“When?” she whispered.

“When the code of the looters has collapsed.”

He saw her looking at him, her glance half-question, half-hope, and he added, “When the creed of self-immolation has run, for once, its undisguised course—when men find no victims ready to obstruct the path of justice and to deflect the fall of retribution on themselves—