

the hands of men like Boyle or Larkin? And there's no one left in the coal industry who amounts to much, except Ken Danagger. So she says that she feels almost as if he's a marked man, as if he's hit by a spotlight right now, waiting to be cut down. . . . What are you laughing at? It might sound preposterous, but I think it's true. . . . What? . . . Oh yes, you bet she's a smart woman! . . . And then there's another thing involved, she says. A man has to come to a certain mental stage—not anger or despair, but something much, much more than both—before he can be cut down. She can't tell what it is, but she knew, long before the fire, that Ellis Wyatt had reached that stage and something would happen to him. When she saw Ken Danagger in the courtroom today, she said that he was ready for the destroyer. . . . Yes, that's the words she used: he was ready for the destroyer. You see, she doesn't think it's happening by chance or accident. She thinks there's a system behind it, an intention, a man. There's a destroyer loose in the country, who's cutting down the buttresses one after another to let the structure collapse upon our heads. Some ruthless creature moved by some inconceivable purpose. . . . She says that she won't let him get Ken Danagger. She keeps repeating that she must stop Danagger—and she wants to speak to him, to beg, to plead, to revive whatever it is that he's losing, to arm him against the destroyer, before the destroyer comes. She's desperately anxious to reach Danagger first. He has refused to see anyone. He's gone back to Pittsburgh, to his mines. But she got him on the phone, late today, and she's made an appointment to see him tomorrow afternoon. . . . Yes, she'll go to Pittsburgh tomorrow. . . . Yes, she's afraid for Danagger, terribly afraid. . . . No. She knows nothing about the destroyer. She has no clue to his identity, no evidence of his existence—except the trail of destruction. But she feels certain that he exists. . . . No, she cannot guess his purpose. She says that nothing on earth could justify him. There are times when she feels that she'd like to find him more than any other man in the world, more than the inventor of the motor. She says that if she found the destroyer, she'd shoot him on sight—she'd be willing to give her life if she could take his first and by her own hand. . . . because he's the most evil creature that's ever existed, the man who's draining the brains of the world. . . . I guess it's getting to be too much for her, at times—even for her. I don't think she allows herself to know how tired she is. The other morning, I came to work very early and I found her asleep on the couch in her office, with the light still burning on her desk. She'd been there all night. I just stood and looked at her. I wouldn't have awakened her if the whole goddamn railroad collapsed. . . . When she was asleep? Why, she looked like a young girl. She looked as if she felt certain that she would awaken in a world where no one would harm her, as if she had nothing to hide or to fear. That's what was terrible—that guiltless purity of her face, with her body twisted by exhaustion, still lying there as she had collapsed. She looked—say, why should you ask me what she looks like when she's asleep? . . . Yes, you're right, why do I talk about it? I shouldn't. I don't know what made me think of it. . . . Don't pay any attention to me. I'll be all right

tomorrow. I guess it's just that I'm sort of shell-shocked by that courtroom. I keep thinking: if men like Rearden and Danagger are to be sent to jail, then what kind of world are we working in and what for? Isn't there any justice left on earth? I was foolish enough to say that to a reporter when we were leaving the courtroom—and he just laughed and said, 'Who is John Galt?' . . . Tell me, what's happening to us? Isn't there a single man of justice left? Isn't there anyone to defend them? Oh, do you hear me? Isn't there anyone to defend them?"

\*   \*

"Mr. Danagger will be free in a moment, Miss Taggart. He has a visitor in his office. Will you excuse it, please?" said the secretary.

Through the two hours of her flight to Pittsburgh, Dagny had been tensely unable to justify her anxiety or to dismiss it; there was no reason to count minutes, yet she had felt a blind desire to hurry. The anxiety vanished when she entered the anteroom of Ken Danagger's office: she had reached him, nothing had happened to prevent it, she felt safety, confidence and an enormous sense of relief.

The words of the secretary demolished it. You're becoming a coward—thought Dagny, feeling a causeless jolt of dread at the words, out of all proportion to their meaning.

"I am so sorry, Miss Taggart." She heard the secretary's respectful, solicitous voice and realized that she had stood there without answering. "Mr. Danagger will be with you in just a moment. Won't you sit down?" The voice conveyed an anxious concern over the impropriety of keeping her waiting.

Dagny smiled. "Oh, that's quite all right."

She sat down in a wooden armchair, facing the secretary's railing. She reached for a cigarette and stopped, wondering whether she would have time to finish it, hoping that she would not, then lighted it brusquely.

It was an old-fashioned frame building, this headquarters of the great Danagger Coal Company. Somewhere in the hills beyond the window were the pits where Ken Danagger had once worked as a miner. He had never moved his office away from the coal fields.

She could see the mine entrances cut into the hillsides, small frames of metal girders, that led to an immense underground kingdom. They seemed precariously modest, lost in the violent orange and red of the hills. . . . Under a harsh blue sky, in the sunlight of late October, the sea of leaves looked like a sea of fire . . . like waves rolling to swallow the fragile posts of the mine doorways. She shuddered and looked away: she thought of the flaming leaves spread over the hills of Wisconsin, on the road to Starnesville.

She noticed that there was only a stub left of the cigarette between her fingers. She lighted another.

When she glanced at the clock on the wall of the anteroom, she caught the secretary glancing at it at the same time. Her appointment was for three o'clock; the white dial said: 3:12.

"Please forgive it, Miss Taggart," said the secretary. "Mr. Danagger will be through, any moment now. Mr. Danagger is extremely