

happened to you . . . in the last two months . . . ever since you came back. . . . You've never been so unco-operative!"

"Why, Jim, I haven't argued with you in the last two months."

"That's what I mean!" He caught himself hastily, but not fast enough to miss her smile. "I mean, I wanted to have a conference, I wanted to know your view of the situation—"

"You know it."

"But you haven't said a word!"

"I said everything I had to say, three years ago. I told you where your course would take you. It has."

"Now there you go again! What's the use of theorizing? We're *here*, we're not back three years ago. We've got to deal with the present, not the past. Maybe things would have been different, if we had followed your opinion, maybe, but the fact is that we *didn't*—and we've got to deal with facts. We've got to take reality as it is *now*, today!"

"Well, take it."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Take your reality. I'll merely take your orders."

"That's unfair! I'm asking for your opinion—"

"You're asking for reassurance, Jim. You're not going to get it."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm not going to help you pretend—by arguing with you—that the reality you're talking about is not what it is, that there's still a way to make it work and to save your neck. There isn't."

"Well . . ." There was no explosion, no anger—only the feebly uncertain voice of a man on the verge of abdication. "Well . . . what would *you* want me to do?"

"Give up." He looked at her blankly. "Give up—all of you, you and your Washington friends and your looting planners and the whole of your cannibal philosophy. Give up and get out of the way and let those of us who can, start from scratch out of the ruins."

"No!" The explosion came, oddly, now; it was the scream of a man who would die rather than betray his idea, and it came from a man who had spent his life evading the existence of ideas, acting with the expediency of a criminal. She wondered whether she had ever understood the essence of criminals. She wondered about the nature of the loyalty to the idea of denying ideas.

"No!" he cried, his voice lower, hoarser and more normal, sinking from the tone of a zealot to the tone of an overbearing executive. "That's impossible! That's out of the question!"

"Who said so?"

"Never mind! It's so! Why do you always think of the impractical? Why don't you accept reality as it is and do something about it? You're the realist, you're the doer, the mover, the producer, the Nat Taggart, you're the person who's able to achieve any goal she chooses! You could save us now, you could find a way to make things work—if you *wanted* to!"

She burst out laughing.

*There*, she thought, was the ultimate goal of all that loose academic prattle which businessmen had ignored for years, the goal of all the

slipshod definitions, the sloppy generalities, the soupy abstractions, all claiming that obedience to objective reality is the same as the obedience to the State, that there is no difference between a law of nature and a bureaucrat's directive, that a hungry man is not free, that man must be released from the tyranny of food, shelter and clothing—all of it, for years, that the day might come when Nat Taggart, the realist, would be asked to consider the will of Cuffy Meigs as a *fact* of nature, irrevocable and absolute like steel, rails and gravitation, to accept the Meigs made world as an objective, unchangeable reality—then to continue producing abundance in that world. *There* was the goal of all those con men of library and classroom, who sold their revelations as reason, their “instincts” as science, their cravings as knowledge, the goal of all the savages of the non-objective, the non-absolute, the relative, the tentative, the probable—the savages who, seeing a farmer gather a harvest, can consider it only as a mystic phenomenon unbound by the law of causality and created by the farmers' omnipotent whim, who then proceed to seize the farmer, to chain him, to deprive him of tools, of seeds, of water, of soil, to push him out on a barren rock and to command: “*Now* grow a harvest and feed us!”

No—she thought, expecting Jim to ask it—it would be useless to try to explain what she was laughing at, he would not be able to understand it.

But he did not ask it. Instead, she saw him slumping and heard him say—terrifyingly, because his words were so irrelevant, if he did not understand, and so monstrous, if he did, “Dagny, I'm your brother . . .”

She drew herself up, her muscles growing rigid, as if she were about to face a killer's gun.

“Dagny”—his voice was the soft, nasal, monotonous whine of a beggar—“I *want* to be president of a railroad. I *want* it. Why can't I have my wish as you always have yours? Why shouldn't I be given the fulfillment of my desires as you always fulfill any desire of your own? Why should you be happy while I suffer? Oh yes, the world is yours, you're the one who has the brains to run it. Then why do you permit suffering in your world? You proclaim the pursuit of happiness, but you doom me to frustration. Don't I have the right to demand any form of happiness I choose? Isn't that a debt which you owe me? Am I not your brother?”

His glance was like a prowler's flashlight searching her face for a shred of pity. It found nothing but a look of revulsion.

“It's *your* sin if I suffer! It's your moral failure! I'm your brother, therefore I'm your responsibility, but you've failed to supply my wants, therefore you're guilty! All of mankind's moral leaders have said so for centuries—who are *you* to say otherwise? You're so proud of yourself, you think that you're pure and good—but you can't be good, so long as I'm wretched. My misery is the measure of your sin. My contentment is the measure of your virtue. I *want* this kind of world, today's world, it gives me my share of authority, it allows me to feel important—make it work for me!—do something!—how do I know what?—it's *your* problem and *your* duty! You have the