

not report these desertions, as the directive required; instead, Rearden began to see unfamiliar faces among the workers, the drawn, beaten faces of the long-unemployed, and heard them addressed by the names of the men who had quit. He asked no questions.

There was silence throughout the country. He did not know how many industrialists had retired and vanished on May 1 and 2, leaving their plants to be seized. He counted ten among his own customers, including McNeil of the McNeil Car Foundry in Chicago. He had no way of learning about the others; no reports appeared in the newspapers. The front pages of the newspapers were suddenly full of stories about spring floods, traffic accidents, school picnics and golden-wedding anniversaries.

There was silence in his own home. Lillian had departed on a vacation trip to Florida, in mid-April; it had astonished him, as an inexplicable whim; it was the first trip she had taken alone since their marriage. Philip avoided him, with a look of panic. His mother stared at Rearden in reproachful bewilderment; she said nothing, but she kept bursting into tears in his presence, her manner suggesting that her tears were the most important aspect to consider in whatever disaster it was that she sensed approaching.

On the morning of May 15, he sat at the desk in his office, above the spread of the mills, and watched the colors of the smoke rising to the clear, blue sky. There were spurts of transparent smoke, like waves of heat, invisible but for the structures that shivered behind them; there were streaks of red smoke, and sluggish columns of yellow, and light, floating spirals of blue--and the thick, tight, swiftly pouring coils that looked like twisted bolts of satin tinged a mother-of-pearl pink by the summer sun.

The buzzer rang on his desk, and Miss Ives' voice said, "Dr. Floyd Ferris to see you, without appointment, Mr. Rearden." In spite of its rigid formality, her tone conveyed the question: Shall I throw him out?

There was a faint movement of astonishment in Rearden's face, barely above the line of indifference: he had not expected that particular emissary. He answered evenly, "Ask him to come in."

Dr. Ferris did not smile as he walked toward Rearden's desk; he merely wore a look suggesting that Rearden knew full well that he had good reason to smile and so he would abstain from the obvious.

He sat down in front of the desk, not waiting for an invitation; he carried a briefcase, which he placed across his knees; he acted as if words were superfluous, since his reappearance in this office had made everything clear.

Rearden sat watching him in patient silence.

"Since the deadline for the signing of the national Gift Certificates expires tonight at midnight," said Dr. Ferris, in the tone of a salesman extending a special courtesy to a customer, "I have come to obtain your signature, Mr. Rearden."

He paused, with an air of suggesting that the formula now called for an answer.

"Go on," said Rearden. "I am listening."

"Yes, I suppose I should explain," said Dr. Ferris, "that we wish

to get your signature early in the day in order to announce the fact on a national news broadcast. Although the gift program has gone through quite smoothly, there are still a few stubborn individualists left, who have failed to sign—small fry, really, whose patents are of no crucial value, but we cannot let them remain unbound; as a matter of principle, you understand. They are, we believe, waiting to follow your lead. You have a great popular following, Mr. Rearden, much greater than you suspected or knew how to use. Therefore, the announcement that you have signed will remove the last hopes of resistance and, by midnight, will bring in the last signatures, thus completing the program on schedule.”

Rearden knew that of all possible speeches, this was the last Dr. Ferris would make if any doubt of his surrender remained in the man's mind.

“Go on,” said Rearden evenly. “You haven't finished.”

“You know—as you have demonstrated at your trial—how important it is, and why, that we obtain all that property with the voluntary consent of the victims.” Dr. Ferris opened his briefcase. “Here is the Gift Certificate, Mr. Rearden. We have filled it out and all you have to do is to sign your name at the bottom.”

The piece of paper, which he placed in front of Rearden, looked like a small college diploma, with the text printed in old-fashioned script and the particulars inserted by typewriter. The thing stated that he, Henry Rearden, hereby transferred to the nation all rights to the metal alloy now known as “Rearden Metal,” which would henceforth be manufactured by all who so desired, and which would bear the name of “Miracle Metal,” chosen by the representatives of the people. Glancing at the paper, Rearden wondered whether it was a deliberate mockery of decency, or so low an estimate of their victims' intelligence, that had made the designers of this paper print the text across a faint drawing of the Statue of Liberty.

His eyes moved slowly to Dr. Ferris' face. “You would not have come here,” he said, “unless you had some extraordinary kind of blackjack to use on me. What is it?”

“Of course,” said Dr. Ferris. “I would expect you to understand that. That is why no lengthy explanations are necessary.” He opened his briefcase. “Do you wish to see my blackjack? I have brought a few samples.”

In the manner of a cardsharp whisking out a long fan of cards with one snap of the hand, he spread before Rearden a line of glossy photographic prints. They were photostats of hotel and auto court registers, bearing in Rearden's handwriting the names of Mr. and Mrs. J. Smith.

“You know, of course,” said Dr. Ferris softly, “but you might wish to see whether we know it, that Mrs. J. Smith is Miss Dagny Taggart.”

He found nothing to observe in Rearden's face. Rearden had not moved to bend over the prints, but sat looking down at them with grave attentiveness, as if, from the perspective of distance, he were discovering something about them which he had not known.

“We have a great deal of additional evidence,” said Dr. Ferris,