

She held the receiver pressed to her ear, her arm stiff with the effort not to tremble. She waited, and he heard, in the silence, the futile clicking of the unanswered call.

"He's gone," she said. "They got him. A week is much longer than they need. I don't know how they learn when the time is right, but this"—she pointed at the letter—"this was their time and they wouldn't have missed it."

"Who?"

"The destroyer's agents."

"Are you beginning to think that they really exist?"

"Yes."

"Are you serious?"

"I am. I've met one of them."

"Who?"

"I'll tell you later. I don't know who their leader is, but I'm going to find out, one of these days. I'm going to find out. I'll be damned if I let them—"

She broke off on a gasp; he saw the change in her face the moment before he heard the click of a distant receiver being lifted and the sound of a man's voice saying, across the wire, "Hello?"

"Daniels! Is that *you*? You're alive? You're still there?"

"Why, yes. Is this you, Miss Taggart? What's the matter?"

"I . . . I thought you were gone."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just heard the phone ringing. I was out in the back lot, gathering carrots."

"Carrots?" She was laughing with hysterical relief.

"I have my own vegetable patch out there. Used to be the Institute's parking lot. Are you calling from New York, Miss Taggart?"

"Yes. I just received your letter. Just now. I . . . I had been away."

"Oh." There was a pause, then he said quietly, "There's really nothing more to be said about it, Miss Taggart."

"Tell me, are you going away?"

"No."

"You're not planning to go?"

"No. Where?"

"Do you intend to remain at the Institute?"

"Yes."

"For how long? Indefinitely?"

"Yes—as far as I know."

"Has anyone approached you?"

"About what?"

"About leaving."

"No. Who?"

"Listen, Daniels, I won't try to discuss your letter over the phone. But I must speak to you. I'm coming to see you. I'll get there as fast as I can."

"I don't want you to do that, Miss Taggart. I don't want you to go to such an effort, when it's useless."

"Give me a chance, won't you? You don't have to promise to change your mind, you don't have to commit yourself to anything—only to give me a hearing. If I want to come, it's my risk, I'm taking

it. There are things I want to say to you, I'm asking you only for the chance to say them."

"You know that I will always give you that chance, Miss Taggart."

"I'm leaving for Utah at once. Tonight. But there's one thing I want you to promise me. Will you promise to wait for me? Will you promise to be there when I arrive?"

"Why . . . of course, Miss Taggart. Unless I die or something happens outside my power—but I don't expect it to happen."

"Unless you die, you will wait for me no matter what happens?"

"Of course."

"Do you give me your word that you'll wait?"

"Yes, Miss Taggart."

"Thank you. Good night."

"Good night, Miss Taggart."

She pressed the receiver down and picked it up again in the same sweep of her hand and rapidly dialed a number.

"Eddie? . . . Have them hold the Comet for me. . . . Yes, *tonight's* Comet. Give orders to have my car attached, then come here, to my place, at once." She glanced at her watch. "It's eight-twelve. I have an hour to make it. I don't think I'll hold them up too long. I'll talk to you while I pack."

She hung up and turned to Rearden.

"Tonight?" he said.

"I have to."

"I guess so. Don't you have to go to Colorado, anyway?"

"Yes. I intended to leave tomorrow night. But I think Eddie can manage to take care of my office, and I'd better start now. It takes three days"—she remembered—"it will now take five days to reach Utah. I have to go by train, there are people I have to see on the line—this can't be delayed, either."

"How long will you stay in Colorado?"

"Hard to tell."

"Wire me when you get there, will you? If it looks as if it's going to be long, I'll join you there."

This was the only expression he could give to the words he had desperately wished to say to her, had waited for, had come here to say, and now wished to pronounce more than ever, but knew that it must not be said tonight.

She knew, by a faint, solemn stress in the tone of his voice, that this was his acceptance of her confession, his surrender, his forgiveness. She asked, "Can you leave the mills?"

"It will take me a few days to arrange, but I can."

He knew what her words were admitting, acknowledging and forgiving him, when she said, "Hank, why don't you meet me in Colorado in a week? If you fly your plane, we'll both get there at the same time. And then we'll come back together."

"All right . . . dearest."

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She dictated a list of instructions, while pacing her bedroom, gathering her clothes, hastily packing a suitcase. Rearden had left; Eddie Willers sat at her dressing table, making notes. He seemed to work

in his usual manner of unquestioning efficiency, as if he were not aware of the perfume bottles and powder boxes, as if the dressing table were a desk and the room were only an office.

"I'll phone you from Chicago, Omaha, Flagstaff and Afton," she said, tossing underwear into the suitcase. "If you need me in between, call any operator along the line, with orders to flag the train."

"The Comet?" he asked mildly.

"Hell, yes!--the Comet."

"Okay."

"Don't hesitate to call, if you have to."

"Okay. But I don't think I'll have to."

"We'll manage. We'll work by long-distance phone, just as we did when we—" She stopped.

"--when we were building the John Galt Line?" he asked quietly. They glanced at each other, but said nothing else.

"What's the latest report on the construction crews?" she asked.

"Everything's under way. I got word, just after you left the office, that the grading gangs have started--out of Laurel, Kansas, and out of Jasper, Oklahoma. The rail is on its way to them from Silver Springs. It will be all right. The hardest thing to find was--"

"The men?"

"Yes. The men to put in charge. We had trouble out West, over the Elgin to Midland stretch. All the men we were counting on are gone. I couldn't find anyone able to assume responsibility, neither on our line nor elsewhere. I even tried to get Dan Conway, but--"

"*Dan Conway*?" she asked, stopping.

"Yes. I did. I tried. Do you remember how he used to have rail laid at the rate of five miles a day, right in that part of the country? Oh, I know he'd have reason to hate our guts, but what does it matter now? I found him--he's living on a ranch out in Arizona. I phoned him myself and I begged him to save us. Just to take charge, for one night, of building five and a half miles of track. Five and a half miles, Dagny, that we're stuck with--and he's the greatest railroad builder living! I told him that I was asking him to do it as a gesture of charity to us, if he would. You know, I think he understood me. He wasn't angry. He sounded sad. But he wouldn't do it. He said one must not try to bring people back out of the grave. . . . He wished me luck. I think he meant it. . . . You know, I don't think he's one of those that the destroyer knocked out. I think he just broke by himself."

"Yes. I know he did."

Eddie saw the expression on her face and pulled himself up hastily. "Oh, we finally found a man to put in charge at Elgin," he said, forcing his voice to sound confident. "Don't worry, the track will be built long before you get there."

She glanced at him with the faint suggestion of a smile, thinking of how often she had said these words to him and of the desperate bravery with which he was now trying to tell her: Don't worry. He caught her glance, he understood and the answering hint of his smile had a touch of embarrassed apology.

He turned back to his note pad, feeling anger at himself, sensing