

for his knowledge, but for his uncritical capacity for pushing any buttons; the effort he needed to learn his task was such that his consciousness could be relied upon to have no room for anything else. He opened the rear panel of the machine and stared in bewilderment at the intricate coils: he could find nothing visibly out of order. He put on his rubber gloves, picked up a pair of pliers, tightened a few bolts at random, and scratched his head.

"I don't know," he said; his voice had a sound of helpless docility. "Who am I to know?"

The three men were on their feet, crowding behind the machine to stare at its recalcitrant organs. They were acting merely by reflex: they knew that they did not know.

"But you've got to fix it!" yelled Ferris. "It's got to work! We've got to have electricity!"

"We must continue!" cried Taggart, he was shaking. "It's ridiculous! I won't have it! I won't be interrupted! I won't let *him* off!" He pointed in the direction of the mattress.

"Do something!" Ferris was crying to the mechanic. "Don't just stand there! Do something! Fix it! I order you to fix it!"

"But I don't know what's wrong with it," said the man, blinking. "Then find out!"

"How am I to find out?"

"I order you to fix it! Do you hear me? Make it work—or I'll fire you and throw you in jail!"

"But I don't know what's wrong with it." The man sighed, bewildered. "I don't know what to do."

"It's the vibrator that's out of order," said a voice behind them; they whirled around: Galt was struggling for breath, but he was speaking in the brusque, competent tone of an engineer. "Take it out and pry off the aluminum cover. You'll find a pair of contacts fused together. Force them apart, take a small file and clean up the pitted surfaces. Then replace the cover, plug it back into the machine—and your generator will work."

There was a long moment of total silence.

The mechanic was staring at Galt, he was holding Galt's glance—and even he was able to recognize the nature of the sparkle in the dark green eyes: it was a sparkle of contemptuous mockery.

He made a step back. In the incoherent dimness of his consciousness, in some wordless, shapeless, unintelligible manner, even he suddenly grasped the meaning of what was occurring in that cellar.

He looked at Galt—he looked at the three men—he looked at the machine. He shuddered, he dropped his pliers and ran out of the room.

Galt burst out laughing.

The three men were backing slowly away from the machine. They were struggling not to allow themselves to understand what the mechanic had understood.

"No!" cried Taggart suddenly, glancing at Galt and leaping forward. "No! I won't let him get away with it!" He fell down on his knees, groping frantically to find the aluminum cylinder of the vibra-

tor. "I'll fix it! I'll work it myself! We've got to go on! We've got to break him!"

"Take it easy, Jim," said Ferris uneasily, jerking him up to his feet.

"Hadn't we . . . hadn't we better lay off for the night?" said Mouch pleadingly; he was looking at the door through which the mechanic had escaped, his glance part-envy, part-terror.

"No!" cried Taggart.

"Jim, hasn't he had enough? Don't forget, we have to be careful."

"No! He hasn't had enough! He hasn't even screamed yet!"

"Jim!" cried Mouch suddenly, terrified by something in Taggart's face. "We can't afford to kill him! You know it!"

"I don't care! I want to break him! I want to hear him scream! I want—"

And then it was Taggart who screamed. It was a long, sudden, piercing scream, as if at some sudden sight, though his eyes were staring at space and seemed blankly sightless. The sight he was confronting was within him. The protective walls of emotion, of evasion, of pretense, of semi-thinking and pseudo-words, built up by him through all of his years, had crashed in the span of one moment—the moment when he knew that he wanted Galt to die, knowing fully that his own death would follow.

He was suddenly seeing the motive that had directed all the actions of his life. It was not his incommunicable soul or his love for others or his social duty or any of the fraudulent sounds by which he had maintained his self-esteem: it was the lust to destroy whatever was living, for the sake of whatever was not. It was the urge to defy reality by the destruction of every living value, for the sake of proving to himself that he could exist in defiance of reality and would never have to be bound by any solid, immutable facts. A moment ago, he had been able to feel that he hated Galt above all men, that the hatred was proof of Galt's evil, which he need define no further, that he wanted Galt to be destroyed for the sake of his own survival. Now he knew that he had wanted Galt's destruction at the price of his own destruction to follow, he knew that he had never wanted to survive, he knew that it was Galt's *greatness* he had wanted to torture and destroy—he was seeing it as greatness by his own admission, greatness by the only standard that existed, whether anyone chose to admit it or not: the greatness of a man who was master of reality in a manner no other had equaled. In the moment when he, James Taggart, had found himself facing the ultimatum: to accept reality or die, it was death his emotions had chosen, death, rather than surrender to that realm of which Galt was so radiant a son. In the person of Galt—he knew—he had sought the destruction of all existence.

It was not by means of words that his knowledge confronted his consciousness: as all his knowledge had consisted of emotions, so now he was held by an emotion and a vision that he had no power to dispel. He was no longer able to summon the fog to conceal the sight of all those blind alleys he had struggled never to be forced to see: now, at the end of every alley, he was seeing his hatred of existence—he was seeing the face of Cherryl Taggart with her joyous