

to know where he is," he said, his voice low. "Just to know where he is, right now, at this moment."

"What would you do, if you knew it?"

He dropped his hand in a gesture of futility. "I wouldn't approach him. The only homage I can still pay him is not to cry for forgiveness where no forgiveness is possible."

They remained silent. They listened to the voices around them, to the splinters of panic trickling through the luxurious room.

She had not been aware that the same presence seemed to be an invisible guest at every table, that the same subject kept breaking through the attempts at any other conversation. People sat in a manner, not quite of cringing, but as if they found the room too large and too exposed—a room of glass, blue velvet, aluminum and gentle lighting. They looked as if they had come to this room at the price of countless evasions, to let it help them pretend that theirs was still a civilized existence—but an act of primeval violence had blasted the nature of their world into the open and they were no longer able not to see.

"How could he? How could he?" a woman was demanding with petulant terror. "He had no *right* to do it!"

"It was an accident," said a young man with a staccato voice and an odor of public payroll. "It was a chain of coincidences, as any statistical curve of probabilities can easily prove. It is unpatriotic to spread rumors exaggerating the power of the people's enemies."

"Right and wrong is all very well for academic conversations," said a woman with a schoolroom voice and a barroom mouth, "but how can anybody take his own ideas seriously enough to destroy a fortune when people need it?"

"I don't understand it," an old man was saying with quavering bitterness. "After centuries of efforts to curb man's innate brutality, after centuries of teaching, training and indoctrination with the gentle and the humane!"

A woman's bewildered voice rose uncertainly and trailed off: "I thought we were living in an age of brotherhood . . ."

"I'm scared," a young girl was repeating. "I'm scared . . . oh, I don't know! . . . I'm just scared . . ."

"He couldn't have done it!" . . . "He did!" . . . "But why?" . . . "I refuse to believe it!" . . . "It's not human!" . . . "But why?" . . . "Just a worthless playboy!" . . . "But why?"

The muffled scream of a woman across the room and some half grasped signal on the edge of Dagny's vision came simultaneously and made her whirl to look at the city.

The calendar was run by a mechanism locked in a room behind the screen, unrolling the same film year after year projecting the dates in steady rotation, in changeless rhythm, never moving but on the stroke of midnight. The speed of Dagny's turn gave her time to see a phenomenon as unexpected as if a planet had reversed its orbit in the sky, she saw the words "September 2" moving upward and vanishing past the edge of the screen.

Then, written across the enormous page, stopping time, as a last

message to the world and to the world's motor which was New York, she saw the lines of a sharp, intransigent handwriting:

Brother, you asked for it!

Francisco Domingo Carlos Andres Sebastián d'Anconia

She did not know which shock was greater: the sight of the message or the sound of Rearden's laughter—Rearden, standing on his feet, in full sight and hearing of the room behind him, laughing above their moans of panic, laughing in greeting, in salute, in acceptance of the gift he had tried to reject, in release, in triumph, in surrender.

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On the evening of September 7, a copper wire broke in Montana, stopping the motor of a loading crane on a spur track of Taggart Transcontinental, at the rim of the Stanford Copper Mine.

The mine had been working on three shifts, its days and nights blending into a single stretch of struggle to lose no minute, no drop of copper it would squeeze from the shelves of a mountain into the nation's industrial desert. The crane broke down at the task of loading a train; it stopped abruptly and hung still against the evening sky, between a string of empty cars and piles of suddenly immovable ore.

The men of the railroad and of the mine stopped in dazed bewilderment: they found that in all the complexity of their equipment, among the drills, the motors, the derricks, the delicate gauges, the ponderous floodlights beating down into the pits and ridges of a mountain—there was no wile to mend the crane. They stopped, like men on an ocean liner propelled by ten-thousand-horsepower generators, but perishing for lack of a safety pin.

The station agent, a young man with a swift body and a brusque voice, stripped the wiring from the station building and set the crane in motion again—and while the ore went clattering to fill the cars, the light of candles came trembling through the dusk from the windows of the station.

"Minnesota, Eddie," said Dagny grimly, closing the drawer of her special file. "Tell the Minnesota Division to ship half their stock of wire to Montana." "But good God, Dagny!—with the peak of the harvest rush approaching—" "They'll hold through it—I think. We don't dare lose a single supplier of copper."

"But I have!" screamed James Taggart, when she reminded him once more. "I have obtained for you the top priority on copper wire, the first claim, the uppermost ration level, I've given you all the cards, certificates, documents and requisitions—what else do you want?" "The copper wire." "I've done all I could! Nobody can blame me!"

She did not argue. The afternoon newspaper was lying on his desk—and she was staring at an item on the back page: An Emergency State Tax had been passed in California for the relief of the state's unemployed, in the amount of fifty per cent of any local corporation's gross income ahead of other taxes; the California oil companies had gone out of business.

"Don't worry, Mr. Rearden," said an unctuous voice over a long-distance telephone line from Washington, "I just wanted to assure you that you will not have to worry." "About what?" asked Rearden.