

it? That was all the information we needed. The rest was easy to trace. You mustn't blame that mine owner too much. The copper producers, as you know, are being squeezed so badly right now that the man had to offer something of value in order to obtain a favor, an 'emergency need' ruling which suspended a few of the directives in his case and gave him a little breathing spell. The person to whom he traded his information knew where it would have the highest value, so he traded it to me, in return for certain favors *he* needed. So all the necessary evidence, as well as the next ten years of your life, are now in my possession—and I am offering you a trade. I'm sure you won't object, since trade is your specialty. The form may be a little different from what it was in your youth—but you're a smart trader, you've always known how to take advantage of changing conditions, and these are the conditions of our day, so it should not be difficult for you to see where your interests lie and to act accordingly."

Rearden said calmly, "In my youth, this was called blackmail."

Dr. Ferris grinned. "That's what it is, Mr. Rearden. We've entered a much more realistic age."

But there was a peculiar difference, thought Rearden, between the manner of a plain blackmailer and that of Dr. Ferris. A blackmailer would show signs of gloating over his victim's sin and of acknowledging its evil, he would suggest a threat to the victim and a sense of danger to them both. Dr. Ferris conveyed none of it. His manner was that of dealing with the normal and the natural, it suggested a sense of safety, it held no tone of condemnation, but a hint of comradeship, a comradeship based—for both of them—on self-contempt. The sudden feeling that made Rearden lean forward in a posture of eager attentiveness, was the feeling that he was about to discover another step along his half glimpsed trail.

Seeing Rearden's look of interest, Dr. Ferris smiled and congratulated himself on having caught the right key. The game was clear to him now, the markings of the pattern were falling in the right order; some men, thought Dr. Ferris, would do anything so long as it was left unnamed, but this man wanted frankness, this was the tough realist he had expected to find.

"You're a practical man, Mr. Rearden," said Dr. Ferris amiably. "I can't understand why you should want to stay behind the times. Why don't you adjust yourself and play it right? You're smarter than most of them. You're a valuable person, we've wanted you for a long time, and when I heard that you were trying to string along with Jim Taggart, I knew you could be had. Don't bother with Jim Taggart, he's nothing, he's just flea-bait. Get into the big game. We can use you and you can use us. Want us to step on Orren Boyle for you? He's given you an awful beating, want us to trim him down a little? It can be done. Or want us to keep Ken Danagger in line? Look how impractical you've been about that. I know why you sold him the Metal—it's because you need him to get coal from. So you take a chance on going to jail and paying huge fines, just to keep on the good side of Ken Danagger. Do you call that good business? Now, make a deal with us and just let Mr. Danagger understand that

if he doesn't toe the line, *he'll* go to jail, but *you* won't, because you've got friends he hasn't got—and you'll never have to worry about your coal supply from then on. Now *that's* the modern way of doing business. Ask yourself which way is more practical. And whatever anyone's said about you, nobody's ever denied that you're a great businessman and a hard-headed realist."

"That's what I am," said Rearden.

"That's what I thought," said Dr. Ferris. "You rose to riches in an age when most men were going bankrupt, you've always managed to blast obstacles, to keep your mills going and to make money—that's your reputation—so you wouldn't want to be impractical now, would you? What for? What do you care, so long as you make money? Leave the theories to people like Bertram Scudder and the ideals to people like Ralph Eubank—and be yourself. Come down to earth. You're not the man who'd let sentiment interfere with business."

"No," said Rearden slowly, "I wouldn't. Not any kind of sentiment."

Dr. Ferris smiled. "Don't you suppose we knew it?" he said, his tone suggesting that he was letting his patent-leather hair down to impress a fellow criminal by a display of superior cunning. "We've waited a long time to get something on you. You honest men are such a problem and such a headache. But we knew you'd slip sooner or later—and this is just what we wanted."

"You seem to be pleased about it."

"Don't I have good reason to be?"

"But, after all, I did break one of your laws."

"Well, what do you think they're for?"

Dr. Ferris did not notice the sudden look on Rearden's face, the look of a man hit by the first vision of that which he had sought to see. Dr. Ferris was past the stage of seeing; he was intent upon delivering the last blows to an animal caught in a trap.

"Did you really think that we want those laws to be observed?" said Dr. Ferris. "We *want* them broken. You'd better get it straight that it's not a bunch of boy scouts you're up against—then you'll know that this is not the age for beautiful gestures. We're after power and we mean it. You fellows were pikers, but we know the real trick, and you'd better get wise to it. There's no way to rule innocent men. The only power any government has is the power to crack down on criminals. Well, when there aren't enough criminals, one *makes* them. One declares so many things to be a crime that it becomes impossible for men to live without breaking laws. Who wants a nation of law-abiding citizens? What's there in that for anyone? But just pass the kind of laws that can neither be observed nor enforced nor objectively interpreted—and you create a nation of law-breakers—and then you cash in on guilt. Now that's the system, Mr. Rearden, that's the game, and once you understand it, you'll be much easier to deal with."

Watching Dr. Ferris watch him, Rearden saw the sudden twitch of anxiety, the look that precedes panic, as if a clean card had fallen on the table from a deck Dr. Ferris had never seen before.