

its size—and for a moment, this was the great, dead foundry at Stockton, Colorado, it was Nielsen Motors . . . it was Rearden Steel.

"Hi, Dagny!"

The smiling face that approached her out of the fog was Andrew Stockton's and she saw a grimy hand extended to her with a gesture of confident pride, as if it held all of her moment's vision on its palm.

She clasped the hand. "Hello," she said softly, not knowing whether she was greeting the past or the future. Then she shook her head and added, "How come you're not planting potatoes or making shoes around here? You've actually remained in your own profession."

"Oh, Calvin Atwood of the Atwood Light and Power Company of New York City is making the shoes. Besides, my profession is one of the oldest and most immediately needed anywhere. Still, I had to fight for it. I had to ruin a competitor, first."

"What?"

He grinned and pointed to the glass door of a sun-flooded room. "There's my ruined competitor," he said.

She saw a young man bent over a long table, working on a complex model for the mold of a drill head. He had the slender, powerful hands of a concert pianist and the grim face of a surgeon concentrating on his task.

"He's a sculptor," said Stockton. "When I came here, he and his partner had a sort of combination hand-forge and repair shop. I opened a real foundry, and took all their customers away from them. The boy couldn't do the kind of job I did, it was only a part-time business for him, anyway—sculpture is his real business—so he came to work for me. He's making more money now, in shorter hours, than he used to make in his own foundry. His partner was a chemist, so he went into agriculture and he's produced a chemical fertilizer that's doubled some of the crops around here—did you mention potatoes?—potatoes, in particular."

"Then somebody could put you out of business, too?"

"Sure. Any time. I know one man who could and probably will, when he gets here. But, boy!—I'd work for him as a cinder sweeper. He'd blast through this valley like a rocket. He'd triple everybody's production."

"Who's that?"

"Hank Rearden."

"Yes . . ." she whispered. "Oh yes!"

She wondered what had made her say it with such immediate certainty. She felt, simultaneously, that Hank Rearden's presence in this valley was impossible—and that this was his place, peculiarly his, this was the place of his youth, of his start, and, together, the place he had been seeking all his life, the land he had struggled to reach the goal of his tortured battle. . . . It seemed to her that the spirals of flame-tinged fog were drawing time into an odd circle—and while a dim thought went floating through her mind like the streamer of an unfollowed sentence: To hold an unchanging youth is to reach, at the end, the vision with which one started—she heard the voice of a tramp in a diner, saying, "John Galt found the fountain

of youth which he wanted to bring down to men. Only he never came back . . . because he found that it couldn't be brought down."

A sheaf of sparks went up in the depth of the fog—and she saw the broad back of a foreman whose arm made the sweeping gesture of a signal, directing some invisible task. He jerked his head to snap an order—she caught a glimpse of his profile—and she caught her breath. Stockton saw it, chuckled and called into the fog:

"Hey, Ken! Come here! Here's an old friend of yours!"

She looked at Ken Danagger as he approached them. The great industrialist, whom she had tried so desperately to hold to his desk, was now dressed in smudged overalls.

"Hello, Miss Taggart. I told you we'd soon meet again."

Her head dropped, as if in assent and in greeting, but her hand bore down heavily upon her cane, for a moment, while she stood reliving their last encounter: The tortured hour of waiting, then the gently distant face at the desk and the thinking of a glass-paneled door closing upon a stranger.

It was so brief a moment that two of the men before her could take it only as a greeting—but it was at Galt that she looked when she raised her head, and she saw him looking at her as if he knew what she felt—she saw him seeing in her face the realization that it was he who had walked out of Danagger's office, that day. His face gave her nothing in answer: it had that look of respectful severity with which a man stands before the fact that the truth is the truth.

"I didn't expect it," she said softly, to Danagger. "I never expected to see you again."

Danagger was watching her as if she were a promising child he had once discovered and was now affectionately amused to watch. "I know," he said. "But why are you so shocked?"

"I . . . oh, it's just that it's preposterous!" She pointed at his clothes.

"What's wrong with it?"

"Is this, then, the end of your road?"

"Hell, no! The beginning."

"What are you aiming at?"

"Mining. Not coal, though. Iron."

"Where?"

He pointed toward the mountains. "Right here. Did you ever know Midas Mulligan to make a bad investment? You'd be surprised what one can find in that stretch of rock, if one knows how to look. That's what I've been doing—looking."

"And if you don't find any iron ore?"

He shrugged. "There's other things to do. I've always been short on time in my life, never on what to use it for."

She glanced at Stockton with curiosity. "Aren't you training a man who could become your most dangerous competitor?"

"That's the only sort of men I like to hire. Dagny, have you lived too long among the looters? Have you come to think that one man's ability is a threat to another?"

"Oh no! But I thought I was almost the only one left who didn't think that."

"Any man who's afraid of hiring the best ability he can find, is a cheat who's in a business where he doesn't belong. To me—the foulest man on earth, more contemptible than a criminal, is the employer who rejects men for being too good. That's what I've always thought and—say, what are you laughing at?"

She was listening to him with an eager, incredulous smile. "It's so startling to hear," she said, "because it's so right!"

"What else can one think?"

She chuckled softly. "You know, when I was a child, I expected every businessman to think it."

"And since then?"

"Since then, I've learned not to expect it."

"But it's right, isn't it?"

"I've learned not to expect the right."

"But it stands to reason, doesn't it?"

"I've given up expecting reason."

"That's what one must never give up," said Ken Danagger.

They had returned to the car and had started down the last, descending curves of the road, when she glanced at Galt and he turned to her at once, as if he had expected it.

"It was you in Danagger's office that day, wasn't it?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Did you know, then, that I was waiting outside?"

"Yes."

"Did you know what it was like, to wait behind that closed door?"

She could not name the nature of the glance with which he looked at her. It was not pity, because she did not seem to be its object; it was the kind of glance with which one looks at suffering, but it was not *her* suffering that he seemed to be seeing.

"Oh yes," he answered quietly, almost lightly.

The first shop to rise by the side of the valley's single street was like the sudden sign of an open theater; a frame box without front wall, its stage set in the bright colors of a musical comedy—with red cubes, green circles, gold triangles, which were bins of tomatoes, barrels of lettuce, pyramids of oranges, and a spangled backdrop where the sun hit shelves of metal containers. The name on the marquee said: HAMMOND GROCERY MARKET. A distinguished man in shirt sleeves, with a stern profile and gray temples, was weighing a chunk of butter for an attractive young woman who stood at the counter, her posture light as a show girl's, the skirt of her cotton dress swelling faintly in the wind, like a dance costume. Dagny smiled involuntarily, even though the man was Lawrence Hammond.

The shops were small one-story structures, and as they moved past her, she caught familiar names on their signs like headings on the pages of a book riffled by the car's motion: MULLIGAN GENERAL STORE—ATWOOD LEATHER GOODS—NIELSEN LUMBER—then the sign of the dollar above the door of a small brick factory with the inscription: MULLIGAN TOBACCO COMPANY. "Who's the Company, besides Midas Mulligan?" she asked. "Dr. Akston," he answered.

There were few passers-by, some men, fewer women, and they walked with purposeful swiftness, as if bound on specific errands.