seconds to realize that it was the old man at the cigar stand who had called.

"I've been waiting to catch sight of you for days, Miss Taggart. I've been extremely anxious to speak to you." There was an odd expression on his face, the look of an effort not to look frightened.

"I'm sorry," she said, smiling, "I've been rushing in and out of the building all week and didn't have time to stop."

He did not smile. "Miss Taggart, that cigarette with the dollar sign that you gave me some months ago—where did you get it?"

She stood still for a moment. "I'm afraid that's a long, complicated story," she answered.

"Have you any way of getting in touch with the person who gave it to you?"

"I suppose so—though I'm not too sure. Why?"

"Would he tell you where he got it?"

"I don't know. What makes you suspect that he wouldn't?"

He hesitated, then asked, "Miss Taggart, what do you do when you have to tell someone something which you know to be impossible?"

She chuckled. "The man who gave me the cigarette said that in such a case one must check one's premises."

"He did? About the cigarette?"

"Well, no, not exactly. But why? What is it you have to tell me?"

"Miss Taggart, I have inquired all over the world. I have checked every source of information in and about the tobacco industry. I have had that cigarette stub put through a chemical analysis. There is no plant that manufactures that kind of paper. The flavoring elements in that tobacco have never been used in any smoking mixture I could find. That cigarette was machine-made, but it was not made in any factory I know—and I know them all. Miss Taggart, to the best of my knowledge, that cigarette was not made anywhere on earth."

* *

Rearden stood by, watching absently, while the waiter wheeled the dinner table out of his hotel room. Ken Danagger had left. The room was half-dark; by an unspoken agreement, they had kept the lights low during their dinner, so that Danagger's face would not be noticed and, perhaps, recognized by the waiters.

They had had to meet furtively, like criminals who could not be seen together. They could not meet in their offices or in their homes, only in the crowded anonymity of a city, in his suite at the Wayne-Falkland Hotel. There could be a fine of $10,000 and ten years of imprisonment for each of them, if it became known that he had agreed to deliver to Danagger four thousand tons of structural shapes of Rearden Metal.

They had not discussed that law, at their dinner together, or their motives or the risk they were taking. They had merely talked business. Speaking clearly and dryly, as he always spoke at any conference, Danagger had explained that half of his original order would be sufficient to brace such tunnels as would cave in, if he delayed the bracing much longer, and to recondition the mines of the Confederated Coal Company, gone bankrupt, which he had purchased three

weeks ago—"It's an excellent property, but in rotten condition; they had a nasty accident there last month, cave-in and gas explosion, forty men killed." He had added, in the monotone of reciting some impersonal, statistical report, "The newspapers are yelling that coal is now the most crucial commodity in the country. They are also yelling that the coal operators are profiteering in the oil shortage. One gang in Washington is yelling that I am expanding too much and something should be done to stop me, because I am becoming a monopoly. Another gang in Washington is yelling that I am not expanding enough and something should be done to let the government seize my mines, because I am greedy for profits and unwilling to satisfy the public's need of fuel. At my present rate of profit, this Confederated Coal property will bring back the money I spent on it—in forty-seven years. I have no children. I bought it, because there's one customer I don't dare leave without coal—and that's Taggart Transcontinental. I keep thinking of what would happen if the railroads collapsed." He had stopped, then added, "I don't know why I still care about that, but I do. Those people in Washington don't seem to have a clear picture of what that would be like. I have." Rearden had said, "I'll deliver the Metal. When you need the other half of your order, let me know. I'll deliver that, too."

At the end of the dinner, Danagger had said in the same precise impassive tone, the tone of a man who knows the exact meaning of his words, "If any employee of yours or mine discovers this and attempts private blackmail, I will pay it, within reason. But I will not pay, if he has friends in Washington. If any of those come around, then I go to jail." "Then we go together," Rearden had said.

Standing alone in his half-darkened room, Rearden noted that the prospect of going to jail left him blankly indifferent. He remembered the time when, aged fourteen, faint with hunger, he would not steal fruit from a sidewalk stand. Now, the possibility of being sent to jail—if this dinner was a felony—meant no more to him than the possibility of being run over by a truck, an ugly physical accident without any moral significance.

He thought that he had been made to hide, as a guilty secret, the only business transaction he had enjoyed in a year's work—and that he was hiding, as a guilty secret, his nights with Dagny, the only hours that kept him alive. He felt that there was some connection between the two secrets, some essential connection which he had to discover. He could not grasp it, he could not find the words to name it, but he felt that the day when he would find them, he would answer every question of his life.

He stood against the wall, his head thrown back, his eyes closed, and thought of Dagny, and then he felt that no questions could matter to him any longer. He thought that he would see her tonight, almost hating it, because tomorrow morning seemed so close and then he would have to leave her—he wondered whether he could remain in town tomorrow, or whether he should leave now, without seeing her, so that he could wait, so that he could always have it ahead of him: the moment of closing his hands over her shoulders and looking down at her face. You're going insane, he thought—but