

roadside on his long drive from Washington, undertaken specifically for the purpose of meeting Mr. Rearden in person. Rearden said nothing. Dr. Ferris looked out the window and commented on the inspiring sight of the Rearden mills which, he said, were one of the most valuable productive enterprises in the country.

"That is not what you thought of my product a year and a half ago," said Rearden.

Dr. Ferris gave a brief frown, as if a dot of the pattern had slipped and almost cost him the game, then chuckled, as if he had recaptured it. "That was a year and a half ago, Mr. Rearden," he said easily. "Times change, and people change with the times—the wise ones do. Wisdom lies in knowing when to remember and when to forget. Consistency is not a habit of mind which it is wise to practice or to expect of the human race."

He then proceeded to discourse upon the foolishness of consistency in a world where nothing was absolute except the principle of compromise. He talked earnestly, but in a casual manner, as if both understood that this was not the main subject of their interview; yet, oddly, he spoke not in the tone of a foreword, but in the tone of a postscript, as if the main subject had been settled long ago.

Rearden waited for the first "Don't you think so?" and answered, "Please state the urgent matter for which you requested this appointment."

Dr. Ferris looked astonished and blank for a moment, then said brightly, as if remembering an unimportant subject which could be disposed of without effort, "Oh, that? That was in regard to the dates of delivery of Rearden Metal to the State Science Institute. We should like to have five thousand tons by the first of December, and then we'll be quite agreeable to waiting for the balance of the order until after the first of the year."

Rearden sat looking at him silently for a long time; each passing moment had the effect of making the gay intonations of Dr. Ferris' voice, still hanging in the air of the room, seem more foolish. When Dr. Ferris had begun to dread that he would not answer at all, Rearden answered, "Hasn't the traffic cop with the leather leggings, whom you sent here, given you a report on his conversation with me?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Rearden, but—"

"What else do you want to hear?"

"But that was five months ago, Mr. Rearden. A certain event has taken place since, which makes me quite sure that you have changed your mind and that you will make no trouble for us at all, just as we will make no trouble for you."

"What event?"

"An event of which you have far greater knowledge than I—but, you see, I do have knowledge of it, even though you would much prefer me to have none."

"What event?"

"Since it is your secret, Mr. Rearden, why not let it remain a secret? Who doesn't have secrets nowadays? For instance, Project X is a secret. You realize, of course, that we could obtain your Metal

simply by having it purchased in smaller quantities by various government offices who would then transfer it to us—and you would not be able to prevent it. But this would necessitate our letting a lot of lousy bureaucrats”—Dr. Ferris smiled with disarming frankness—“oh yes, we are as unpopular with one another as we are with you private citizens—it would necessitate our letting a lot of other bureaucrats in on the secret of Project X, which would be highly undesirable at this time. And so would any newspaper publicity about the Project—if we put you on trial for refusal to comply with a government order. But if you had to stand trial on another, much more serious charge, where Project X and the State Science Institute were not involved, and where you could not raise any issue of principle or arouse any public sympathy—why, that would not inconvenience us at all, but it would cost you more than you would care to contemplate. Therefore, the only practical thing for you to do is to help us keep our secret and get us to help you keep yours—and, as I’m sure you realize, we are fully able to keep any of the bureaucrats safely off your trail for as long as we wish.”

“What event, what secret and what trail?”

“Oh, come, Mr. Rearden, don’t be childish! The four thousand tons of Rearden Metal which you delivered to Ken Danagger, of course,” said Dr. Ferris lightly.

Rearden did not answer.

“Issues of principle are such a nuisance,” said Dr. Ferris, smiling, “and such a waste of time for all concerned. Now would you care to be a martyr for an issue of principle, only in circumstances where nobody will know that that’s what you are—nobody but you and me—where you won’t get a chance to breathe a word about the issue or the principle—where you won’t be a hero, the creator of a spectacular new metal, making a stand against enemies whose actions might appear somewhat shabby in the eyes of the public—where you won’t be a hero, but a common criminal, a greedy industrialist—who’s cheated the law for a plain motive of profit, a racketeer of the black market who’s broken the national regulations designed to protect the public welfare—a hero without glory and without public, who’ll accomplish no more than about half a column of newsprint somewhere on page five—now would you still care to be that kind of martyr? Because that’s just what the issue amounts to now: either you let us have the Metal or you go to jail for ten years and take your friend Danagger along, too.”

As a biologist, Dr. Ferris had always been fascinated by the theory that animals had the capacity to smell fear, he had tried to develop a similar capacity in himself. Watching Rearden, he concluded that the man had long since decided to give in—because he caught no trace of any fear.

“Who was your informer?” asked Rearden.

“One of your friends, Mr. Rearden. The owner of a copper mine in Arizona, who reported to us that you had purchased an extra amount of copper last month, above the regular tonnage required for the monthly quota of Rearden Metal which the law permits you to produce. Copper is one of the ingredients of Rearden Metal, isn’t