tender He ignored the empty glass in front of Betty Pope, who stood at Philip's other side

"Look, bud," said Bertram Scudder, his eyeballs focused approximately in the direction of Philip "whether you like it or not, the Equalization of Opportunity Bill represents a great step forward'

'What made you think that I did not like it Mr Scudder?' Philip asked humbly

Well it's going to pinch isn t it? The long arm of society is going to trim a little off the hors d'oeuvres bill around here' He waved his hand at the bar

"Why do you assume that I object to that?'

"You don't?' Bertram Scudder asked without curiosity

"I don t!' said Philip hotly I have always placed the public good above any personal consideration I have contributed my time and money to Friends of Global Progress in their crusade for the Equalization of Opportunity Bill I think it is perfectly unfair that one man should get all the breaks and leave none to others

Bertram Scudder considered him speculatively but without particular interest Well that s quite unusually nice of you he said

'Some people do take moral issues seriously Mr Scudder said Philip with a gentle stress of pride in his voice

'What s he talking about Philip?' asked Betty Pope We don t know anybody who owns more than one business do we?'

Oh, pipe down! said Bertram Scudder his voice bored

"I don t see why there's so much fuss about that Equalization of Opportunity Bill said Betty Pope aggressively in the tone of an expert on economics I don t see why businessmen object to it It s to their own advantage If everybody else is poor they won t have any market for their goods But if they stop being selfish and share the goods they've hoarded—they ll have a chance to work hard and produce some more

"I do not see why industrialists should be considered at all said Scudder When the masses are destitute and yet there are goods available it s idiotic to expect people to be stopped by some scrap of paper called a property deed Property rights are a superstition One holds property only by the courtesy of those who do not seize it The people can seize it at any moment If they can why shouldn t they?'

"They should ' said Claude Slagenhop They need it Need is the only consideration If people are in need we've got to seize things first and talk about it afterwards'

Claude Slagenhop had approached and managed to squeeze himself between Philip and Scudder, shoving Scudder aside imperceptibly Slagenhop was not tall or heavy, but he had a square compact bulk and a broken nose He was the president of Friends of Global Progress

"Hunger won t wait, said Claude Slagenhop Ideas are just hot air An empty belly is a solid fact I've said in all my speeches that it's not necessary to talk too much Society is suffering for lack of business opportunities at the moment, so we've got the right to seize such opportunities as exist Right is whatever's good for society"

"He didn't dig that ore single-handed, did he?" cried Philip suddenly, his voice shrill. "He had to employ hundreds of workers. They did it. Why does he think he's so good?"

The two men looked at him, Scudder lifting an eyebrow, Slagenhop without expression.

"Oh, dear me!" said Betty Pope, remembering.

Hank Rearden stood at a window in a dim recess at the end of the drawing room. He hoped no one would notice him for a few minutes. He had just escaped from a middle-aged woman who had been telling him about her psychic experiences. He stood, looking out. Far in the distance, the red glow of Rearden Steel moved in the sky. He watched it for a moment's relief.

He turned to look at the drawing room. He had never liked his house; it had been Lillian's choice. But tonight, the shifting colors of the evening dresses drowned out the appearance of the room and gave it an air of brilliant gaiety. He liked to see people being gay, even though he did not understand this particular manner of enjoyment.

He looked at the flowers, at the sparks of light on the crystal glasses, at the naked arms and shoulders of women. There was a cold wind outside, sweeping empty stretches of land. He saw the thin branches of a tree being twisted, like arms waving in an appeal for help. The tree stood against the glow of the mills.

He could not name his sudden emotion. He had no words to state its cause, its quality, its meaning. Some part of it was joy, but it was solemn like the act of baring one's head—he did not know to whom.

When he stepped back into the crowd, he was smiling. But the smile vanished abruptly; he saw the entrance of a new guest: it was Dagny Taggart.

Lillian moved forward to meet her, studying her with curiosity. They had met before, on infrequent occasions, and she found it strange to see Dagny Taggart wearing an evening gown. It was a black dress with a bodice that fell as a cape over one arm and shoulder, leaving the other bare; the naked shoulder was the gown's only ornament. Seeing her in the suits she wore, one never thought of Dagny Taggart's body. The black dress seemed excessively revealing—because it was astonishing to discover that the lines of her shoulder were fragile and beautiful, and that the diamond band on the wrist of her naked arm gave her the most feminine of all aspects: the look of being chained.

"Miss Taggart, it is such a wonderful surprise to see you here," said Lillian Rearden, the muscles of her face performing the motions of a smile. "I had not really dared to hope that an invitation from me would take you away from your ever so much weightier concerns. Do permit me to feel flattered."

James Taggart had entered with his sister. Lillian smiled at him, in the manner of a hasty postscript, as if noticing him for the first time.

"Hello, James. That's your penalty for being popular—one tends to lose sight of you in the surprise of seeing your sister."

"No one can match you in popularity, Lillian," he answered, smiling thinly, "nor ever lose sight of you."