

"You'll have to make up time. You've got the rest of the night to do it. Get the Comet in on schedule."

"Yes, Miss Taggart."

She was turning to go, when the engineer asked, "If there's any trouble, are you taking the responsibility for it, Miss Taggart?"

"I am."

The conductor followed her as she walked back to her car. He was saying, bewildered, "But . . . just a seat in a day coach, Miss Taggart? But how come? But why didn't you let us know?"

She smiled easily. "Had no time to be formal. Had my own car attached to Number 22 out of Chicago, but got off at Cleveland—and Number 22 was running late, so I let the car go. The Comet came next and I took it. There was no sleeping-car space left."

The conductor shook his head. "Your brother—he wouldn't have taken a coach."

She laughed. "No, he wouldn't have."

The men by the engine watched her walking away. The young brakeman was among them. He asked, pointing after her, "Who is that?"

"That's who runs Taggart Transcontinental," said the engineer; the respect in his voice was genuine. "That's the Vice-President in Charge of Operation."

When the train jolted forward, the blast of its whistle dying over the fields, she sat by the window, lighting another cigarette. She thought: It's cracking to pieces, like this, all over the country, you can expect it anywhere, at any moment. But she felt no anger or anxiety; she had no time to feel.

This would be just one more issue, to be settled along with the others. She knew that the superintendent of the Ohio Division was no good and that he was a friend of James Taggart. She had not insisted on throwing him out long ago only because she had no better man to put in his place. Good men were so strangely hard to find. But she would have to get rid of him, she thought, and she would give his post to Owen Kellogg, the young engineer who was doing a brilliant job as one of the assistants to the manager of the Taggart Terminal in New York; it was Owen Kellogg who ran the Terminal. She had watched his work for some time; she had always looked for sparks of competence, like a diamond prospector in an unpromising wasteland. Kellogg was still too young to be made superintendent of a division; she had wanted to give him another year, but there was no time to wait. She would have to speak to him as soon as she returned.

The strip of earth, faintly visible outside the window, was running faster now, blending into a gray stream. Through the dry phrases of calculations in her mind, she noticed that she did have time to feel something: it was the hard, exhilarating pleasure of action.

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With the first whistling rush of air, as the Comet plunged into the tunnels of the Taggart Terminal under the city of New York, Dagny Taggart sat up straight. She always felt it when the train went underground—this sense of eagerness, of hope and of secret excitement. It was as if normal existence were a photograph of shapeless things

in badly printed colors, but this was a sketch done in a few sharp strokes that made things seem clean, important—and worth doing.

She watched the tunnels as they flowed past: bare walls of concrete, a net of pipes and wires, a web of rails that went off into black holes where green and red lights hung as distant drops of color. There was nothing else, nothing to dilute it, so that one could admire naked purpose and the ingenuity that had achieved it. She thought of the Taggart Building standing above her head at this moment, growing straight to the sky, and she thought: These are the roots of the building, hollow roots twisting under the ground, feeding the city.

When the train stopped, when she got off and heard the concrete of the platform under her heels, she felt light, lifted, impelled to action. She started off, walking fast, as if the speed of her steps could give form to the things she felt. It was a few moments before she realized that she was whistling a piece of music—and that it was the theme of Halley's Fifth Concerto.

She felt someone looking at her and turned. The young brakeman stood watching her tensely.

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She sat on the arm of the big chair facing James Taggart's desk, her coat thrown open over a wrinkled traveling suit. Eddie Willers sat across the room, making notes once in a while. His title was that of Special Assistant to the Vice-President in Charge of Operation, and his main duty was to be her bodyguard against any waste of time. She asked him to be present at interviews of this nature, because then she never had to explain anything to him afterwards. James Taggart sat at his desk, his head drawn into his shoulders.

"The Rio Norte Line is a pile of junk from one end to the other," she said. "It's much worse than I thought. But we're going to save it."

"Of course," said James Taggart.

"Some of the rail can be salvaged. Not much and not for long. We'll start laying new rail in the mountain sections, Colorado first. We'll get the new rail in two months."

"Oh, did Orren Boyle say he'll—"

"I've ordered the rail from Rearden Steel."

The slight, choked sound from Eddie Willers was his suppressed desire to cheer.

James Taggart did not answer at once. "Dagny, why don't you sit in the chair as one is supposed to?" he said at last; his voice was petulant. "Nobody holds business conferences this way."

"I do."

She waited. He asked, his eyes avoiding hers, "Did you say that you have ordered the rail from Rearden?"

"Yesterday evening. I phoned him from Cleveland."

"But the Board hasn't authorized it. I haven't authorized it. You haven't consulted me."

She reached over, picked up the receiver of a telephone on his desk and handed it to him.

"Call Rearden and cancel it," she said.

James Taggart moved back in his chair "I haven't said that," he answered angrily "I haven't said that at all"

"Then it stands?"

"I haven't said that, either"

She turned "Eddie, have them draw up the contract with Rearden Steel Jim will sign it" She took a crumpled piece of notepaper from her pocket and tossed it to Eddie "There's the figures and terms"

Taggart said, "But the Board hasn't—"

"The Board hasn't anything to do with it They authorized you to buy the rail thirteen months ago Where you buy it is up to you"

"I don't think it's proper to make such a decision without giving the Board a chance to express an opinion And I don't see why I should be made to take the responsibility"

"I am taking it"

"What about the expenditure which—"

"Rearden is charging less than Orren Boyle's Associated Steel"

"Yes, and what about Orren Boyle?"

"I've cancelled the contract We had the right to cancel it six months ago"

"When did you do that?"

"Yesterday"

"But he hasn't called to have me confirm it"

"He won't"

Taggart sat looking down at his desk She wondered why he resented the necessity of dealing with Rearden, and why his resentment had such an odd, evasive quality Rearden Steel had been the chief supplier of Taggart Transcontinental for ten years, ever since the first Rearden furnace was fired, in the days when their father was president of the railroad For ten years, most of their rail had come from Rearden Steel There were not many firms in the country who delivered what was ordered, when and as ordered Rearden Steel was one of them If she were insane, thought Dagny she would conclude that her brother hated to deal with Rearden because Rearden did his job with superlative efficiency but she would not conclude it, because she thought that such a feeling was not within the humanly possible

"It isn't fair," said James Taggart

"What isn't?"

"That we always give all our business to Rearden It seems to me we should give somebody else a chance, too Rearden doesn't need us, he's plenty big enough We ought to help the smaller fellows to develop Otherwise, we're just encouraging a monopoly"

"Don't talk tripe, Jim"

"Why do we always have to get things from Rearden?"

"Because we always get them"

"I don't like Henry Rearden"

"I do But what does that matter, one way or the other? We need rails and he's the only one who can give them to us"

"The human element is very important You have no sense of the human element at all"

"We're talking about saving a railroad, Jim."