

"Yes, of course, of course, but still, you haven't any sense of the human element."

"No. I haven't."

"If we give Rearden such a large order for steel rails—"

"They're not going to be steel. They're Rearden Metal."

She had always avoided personal reactions, but she was forced to break her rule when she saw the expression on Taggart's face. She burst out laughing.

Rearden Metal was a new alloy, produced by Rearden after ten years of experiments. He had placed it on the market recently. He had received no orders and had found no customers.

Taggart could not understand the transition from the laughter to the sudden tone of Dagny's voice; the voice was cold and harsh: "Drop it, Jim. I know everything you're going to say. Nobody's ever used it before. Nobody approves of Rearden Metal. Nobody's interested in it. Nobody wants it. Still, our rails are going to be made of Rearden Metal."

"But . . ." said Taggart, "but . . . but nobody's ever used it before!"

He observed, with satisfaction, that she was silenced by anger. He liked to observe emotions; they were like red lanterns strung along the dark unknown of another's personality, marking vulnerable points. But how one could feel a personal emotion about a metal alloy, and what such an emotion indicated, was incomprehensible to him; so he could make no use of his discovery.

"The consensus of the best metallurgical authorities," he said, "seems to be highly skeptical about Rearden Metal, contending—"

"Drop it, Jim."

"Well, whose opinion did you take?"

"I don't ask for opinions."

"What do you go by?"

"Judgment."

"Well, whose judgment did you take?"

"Mine."

"But whom did you consult about it?"

"Nobody."

"Then what on earth do you know about Rearden Metal?"

"That it's the greatest thing ever put on the market."

"Why?"

"Because it's tougher than steel, cheaper than steel and will outlast any hunk of metal in existence."

"But who says so?"

"Jim, I studied engineering in college. When I see things, I see them."

"What did you see?"

"Rearden's formula and the tests he showed me."

"Well, if it were any good, somebody would have used it, and nobody has." He saw the flash of anger, and went on nervously: "How can you *know* it's good? How can you be sure? How can you decide?"

"Somebody decides such things, Jim. Who?"

"Well, I don't see why we have to be the first ones. I don't see it at all."

"Do you want to save the Rio Norte Line or not?" He did not answer. "If the road could afford it, I would scrap every piece of rail over the whole system and replace it with Rearden Metal. All of it needs replacing. None of it will last much longer. But we can't afford it. We have to get out of a bad hole, first. Do you want us to pull through or not?"

"We're still the best railroad in the country. The others are doing much worse."

"Then do you want us to remain in the hole?"

"I haven't said that! Why do you always oversimplify things that way? And if you're worried about money, I don't see why you want to waste it on the Rio Norte Line when the Phoenix Durango has robbed us of all our business down there. Why spend money when we have no protection against a competitor who'll destroy our investment?"

Because the Phoenix Durango is an excellent railroad but I intend to make the Rio Norte Line better than that. Because I'm going to beat the Phoenix Durango if necessary - only it won't be necessary, because there will be room for two or three railroads to make fortunes in Colorado. Because I'd mortgage the system to build a branch to any district around Ellis Wyatt.

"I'm sick of hearing about Ellis Wyatt."

He did not like the way her eyes moved to look at him and remained still, looking for a moment.

"I don't see any need for immediate action," he said, he sounded offended. "Just what do you consider so alarming in the present situation of Taggart Transcontinental?"

"The consequences of your policies, Jim."

"Which policies?"

"That thirteen months' experiment with Associated Steel for one. Your Mexican catastrophe, for another."

"The Board approved the Associated Steel contract," he said hastily. "The Board voted to build the San Sebastián Line. Besides, I don't see why you call it a catastrophe."

"Because the Mexican government is going to nationalize your line any day now."

"That's a lie!" His voice was almost a scream. "That's nothing but vicious rumors! I have it on very good inside authority that -"

"Don't show that you're scared, Jim," she said contemptuously.

He did not answer.

"It's no use getting panicky about it now," she said. "All we can do is try to cushion the blow. It's going to be a bad blow. Forty million dollars is a loss from which we won't recover easily. But Taggart Transcontinental has withstood many bad shocks in the past. I'll see to it that it withstands this one."

"I refuse to consider, I absolutely refuse to consider the possibility of the San Sebastián Line being nationalized."

"All right. Don't consider it."

She remained silent. He said defensively, "I don't see why you're

so eager to give a chance to Ellis Wyatt, yet you think it's wrong to take part in developing an underprivileged country that never had a chance."

"Ellis Wyatt is not asking anybody to give him a chance. And I'm not in business to give chances. I'm running a railroad."

"That's an extremely narrow view, it seems to me. I don't see why we should want to help one man instead of a whole nation."

"I'm not interested in helping anybody. I want to make money."

"That's an impractical attitude. Selfish greed for profit is a thing of the past. It has been generally conceded that the interests of society as a whole must always be placed first in any business undertaking which—"

"How long do you intend to talk in order to evade the issue, Jim?"

"What issue?"

"The order for Rearden Metal."

He did not answer. He sat studying her silently. Her slender body, about to slump from exhaustion, was held erect by the straight line of the shoulders, and the shoulders were held by a conscious effort of will. Few people liked her face: the face was too cold, the eyes too intense; nothing could ever lend her the charm of a soft focus. The beautiful legs, slanting down from the chair's arm in the center of his vision, annoyed him; they spoiled the rest of his estimate.

She remained silent, he was forced to ask. "Did you decide to order it just like that, on the spur of the moment, over a telephone?"

"I decided it six months ago. I was waiting for Hank Rearden to get ready to go into production."

"Don't call him *Hank* Rearden. It's vulgar."

"That's what everybody calls him. Don't change the subject."

"Why did you have to telephone him last night?"

"Couldn't reach him sooner."

"Why didn't you wait until you got back to New York and—"

"Because I had seen the Rio Norte Line."

"Well, I need time to consider it, to place the matter before the Board, to consult the best—"

"There is no time."

"You haven't given me a chance to form an opinion."

"I don't give a damn about your opinion. I am not going to argue with you, with your Board or with your professors. You have a choice to make and you're going to make it now. Just say yes or no."

"That's a preposterous, high-handed, arbitrary way of—"

"Yes or no?"

"That's the trouble with you. You always make it 'Yes' or 'No.' Things are never absolute like that. Nothing is absolute."

"Metal rails are. Whether we get them or not, is."

She waited. He did not answer.

"Well?" she asked.

"Are you taking the responsibility for it?"

"I am."

"Go ahead," he said, and added, "but at your own risk. I won't cancel it, but I won't commit myself as to what I'll say to the Board."

"Say anything you wish."