

"Every now and then. When I have time. Why?"

"Were you here the night when they had the rock slide?"

"Yes."

"I was surprised how quickly and well they cleared the track, when I got the reports about it. It made me think that Nealy was a better man than I had thought."

"He isn't."

"Was it you who organized the system of moving his day's supplies down to the line?"

"Sure. His men used to spend half their time hunting for things. Tell him to watch his water tanks. They'll freeze on him one of these nights. See if you can get him a new ditcher. I don't like the looks of the one he's got. Check on his wiring system."

She looked at him for a moment. "Thanks, Ellis," she said.

He smiled and walked on. She watched him as he walked across the bridge, as he started up the long rise toward his derricks.

"He thinks he owns the place, doesn't he?"

She turned, startled. Ben Nealy had approached her; his thumb was pointing at Ellis Wyatt.

"What place?"

"The railroad, Miss Taggart. Your railroad. Or the whole world maybe. That's what he thinks."

Ben Nealy was a bulky man with a soft, sullen face. His eyes were stubborn and blank. In the bluish light of the snow, his skin had the tinge of butter.

"What does he keep hanging around here for?" he said. "As if nobody knew their business but him. The snooty show-off. Who does he think he is?"

"God damn you," said Dagny evenly, not raising her voice.

Nealy could never know what had made her say it. But some part of him, in some way of his own, knew it: the shocking thing to her was that he was not shocked. He said nothing.

"Let's go to your quarters," she said wearily, pointing to an old railway coach on a spur in the distance. "Have somebody there to take notes."

"Now about those crossties, Miss Taggart," he said hastily as they started. "Mr. Coleman of your office okayed them. He didn't say anything about too much bark. I don't see why you think they're—"

"I said you're going to replace them."

When she came out of the coach, exhausted by two hours of effort to be patient, to instruct, to explain—she saw an automobile parked on the torn dirt road below, a black two-seater, sparkling and new. A new car was an astonishing sight anywhere; one did not see them often.

She glanced around and gasped at the sight of the tall figure standing at the foot of the bridge. It was Hank Rearden; she had not expected to find him in Colorado. He seemed absorbed in calculations, pencil and notebook in hand. His clothes attracted attention, like his car and for the same reason; he wore a simple trenchcoat and a hat with a slanting brim, but they were of such good quality, so flagrantly expensive that they appeared ostentatious among the

seedy garments of the crowds everywhere, the more ostentatious because worn so naturally.

She noticed suddenly that she was running toward him; she had lost all trace of exhaustion. Then she remembered that she had not seen him since the party. She stopped.

He saw her, he waved to her in a gesture of pleased, astonished greeting, and he walked forward to meet her. He was smiling.

"Hello," he said. "Your first trip to the job?"

"My fifth, in three months."

"I didn't know you were here. Nobody told me."

"I thought you'd break down some day."

"Break down?"

"Enough to come and see this. There's your Metal. How do you like it?"

He glanced around. "If you ever decide to quit the railroad business, let me know."

"You'd give me a job?"

"Any time."

She looked at him for a moment. "You're only half-kidding, Hank. I think you'd like it having me ask you for a job. Having me for an employee instead of a customer. Giving me orders to obey."

"Yes. I would."

She said, her face hard, "Don't quit the steel business. I won't promise you a job on the railroad."

He laughed. "Don't try it."

"What?"

"To win any battle when I set the terms."

She did not answer. She was struck by what the words made her feel; it was not an emotion, but a physical sensation of pleasure, which she could not name or understand.

"Incidentally," he said, "this is not my first trip. I was here yesterday."

"You were? Why?"

"Oh. I came to Colorado on some business of my own, so I thought I'd take a look at this."

"What are you after?"

"Why do you assume that I'm after anything?"

"You wouldn't waste time coming here just to look. Not twice."

He laughed. "True." He pointed at the bridge. "I'm after that."

"What about it?"

"It's ready for the scrap heap."

"Do you suppose that I don't know it?"

"I saw the specifications of your order for Rearden Metal members for that bridge. You're wasting your money. The difference between what you're planning to spend on a makeshift that will last a couple of years, and the cost of a new Rearden Metal bridge, is comparatively so little that I don't see why you want to bother preserving this museum piece."

"I've thought of a new Rearden Metal bridge. I've had my engineers give me an estimate."

"What did they tell you?"

"Two million dollars."

"Good God!"

"What would you say?"

"Eight hundred thousand."

She looked at him. She knew that he never spoke idly. She asked, trying to sound calm, "How?"

"Like this."

He showed her his notebook. She saw the disjointed notations he had made, a great many figures, a few rough sketches. She understood his scheme before he had finished explaining it. She did not notice that they had sat down, that they were sitting on a pile of frozen lumber, that her legs were pressed to the rough planks and she could feel the cold through her thin stockings. They were bent together over a few scraps of paper which could make it possible for thousands of tons of freight to cross a cut of empty space. His voice sounded sharp and clear, while he explained thrusts, pulls, loads, wind pressures. The bridge was to be a single twelve-hundred-foot-truss span. He had devised a new type of truss. It had never been made before and could not be made except with members that had the strength and the lightness of Rearden Metal.

"Hank," she asked, "did you invent this in two days?"

"Hell, no. I 'invented' it long before I had Rearden Metal. I figured it out while making steel for bridges. I wanted a metal with which one would be able to do this, among other things. I came here just to see your particular problem for myself."

He chuckled, when he saw the slow movement of her hand across her eyes and the line of bitterness in the set of her mouth, as if she were trying to wipe out the things against which she had fought such an exhausting, cheerless battle.

"This is only a rough scheme," he said, "but I believe you see what can be done?"

"I can't tell you all that I see, Hank."

"Don't bother. I know it."

"You're saving Taggart Transcontinental for the second time."

"You used to be a better psychologist than that."

"What do you mean?"

"Why should I give a damn about saving Taggart Transcontinental? Don't you know that I want to have a bridge of Rearden Metal to show the country?"

"Yes, Hank. I know it."

"There are too many people yelping that rails of Rearden Metal are unsafe. So I thought I'd give them something real to yelp about. Let them see a bridge of Rearden Metal."

She looked at him and laughed aloud in simple delight.

"Now what's that?" he asked.

"Hank, I don't know anyone, not anyone in the world, who'd think of such an answer to people, in such circumstances—except you."

"What about you? Would you want to make the answer with me and face the same screaming?"

"You knew I would."

"Yes. I knew it."