the first time, she saw that she did have something to offer Jim: these people were as mean and small as the people from whom she had escaped in Buffalo; he was as lonely as she had always been, and the sincerity of her feeling was the only recognition he had found.

Then she walked back into the ballroom, cutting straight through the crowd, and the only thing left of the tears she had tried to hold back in the darkness of the terrace, was the fiercely luminous sparkle of her eyes. If he wished to stand by her openly, even though she was only a shopgirl, if he wished to flaunt it, if he had brought her here to face the indignation of his friends—then it was the gesture of a courageous man defying their opinion, and she was willing to match his courage by serving as the scarecrow of the occasion.

But she was glad when it was over, when she sat beside him in his car, driving home through the darkness. She felt a bleak kind of relief. Her battling defiance ebbed into a strange, desolate feeling; she tried not to give way to it. Jim said little; he sat looking sullenly out the car window, she wondered whether she had disappointed him in some manner.

On the stoop of her rooming house, she said to him forlornly, "I'm sorry if I let you down . . ."

He did not answer for a moment, and then he asked, "What would you say if I asked you to marry me?"

She looked at him, she looked around them—there was a filthy mattress hanging on somebody's window sill, a pawnshop across the street, a garbage pail at the stoop beside them—one did not ask such a question in such a place, she did not know what it meant, and she answered, "I guess I . . . I haven't any sense of humor."

"This is a proposal, my dear."

Then this was the way they reached their first kiss—with tears running down her face, tears unshed at the party, tears of shock, of happiness, of thinking that this should be happiness, and of a low, desolate voice telling her that this was not the way she would have wanted it to happen.

She had not thought about the newspapers, until the day when Jim told her to come to his apartment and she found it crowded with people who had notebooks, cameras and flash bulbs. When she saw her picture in the papers for the first time—a picture of them together, Jim's arm around her—she giggled with delight and wondered proudly whether every person in the city had seen it. After a while, the delight vanished.

They kept photographing her at the dime-store counter, in the subway, on the stoop of the tenement house, in her miserable room. She would have taken money from Jim now and run to hide in some obscure hotel for the weeks of their engagement—but he did not offer it. He seemed to want her to remain where she was. They printed pictures of Jim at his desk, in the concourse of the Taggart Terminal, by the steps of his private railway car, at a formal banquet in Washington. The huge spreads of full newspaper pages, the articles in magazines, the radio voices, the newsreels, all were a single, long, sustained scream—about the "Cinderella Girl" and the "Democratic Businessman."

She told herself not to be suspicious, when she felt uneasy; she told herself not to be ungrateful, when she felt hurt. She felt it only in a few rare moments, when she awakened in the middle of the night and lay in the silence of her room, unable to sleep. She knew that it would take her years to recover, to believe, to understand. She was reeling through her days like a person with a sunstroke, seeing nothing but the figure of Jim Taggart as she had seen him first on the night of his great triumph.

"Listen, kid," the sob sister said to her, when she stood in her room for the last time, the lace of the wedding veil streaming like crystal foam from her hair to the blotched planks of the floor. "You think that if one gets hurt in life, it's through one's own sins—and that's true, in the long run. But there are people who'll try to hurt you through the good they see in you—knowing that it's the good, needing it and punishing you for it. Don't let it break you when you discover that."

"I don't think I'm afraid," she said, looking intently straight before her, the radiance of her smile melting the earnestness of her glance. "I have no right to be afraid of anything. I'm too happy. You see, I always thought that there wasn't any sense in people saying that all you can do in life is suffer. I wasn't going to knuckle down to that and give up. I thought that things could happen which were beautiful and very great. I didn't expect it to happen to me—not so much and so soon. But I'll try to live up to it."

* *

"Money is the root of all evil," said James Taggart. "Money can't buy happiness. Love will conquer any barrier and any social distance. That may be a bromide, boys, but that's how I feel."

He stood under the lights of the ballroom of the Wayne-Falkland Hotel, in a circle of reporters who had closed about him the moment the wedding ceremony ended. He heard the crowd of guests beating like a tide beyond the circle. Cherryl stood beside him, her white-gloved hand on the black of his sleeve. She was still trying to hear the words of the ceremony, not quite believing that she had heard them.

"How do you feel, *Mrs. Taggart*?"

She heard the question from somewhere in the circle of reporters. It was like the jolt of returning to consciousness: two words suddenly made everything real to her. She smiled and whispered, choking, "I . . . I'm very happy . . ."

At opposite ends of the ballroom, Orren Boyle, who seemed too stout for his full-dress clothes, and Bertram Scudder, who seemed too meager for his, surveyed the crowd of guests with the same thought, though neither of them admitted that he was thinking it. Orren Boyle half-told himself that he was looking for the faces of friends, and Bertram Scudder suggested to himself that he was gathering material for an article. But both, unknown to each other, were drawing a mental chart of the faces they saw, classifying them under two headings which, if named, would have read: "Favor" and "Fear." There were men whose presence signified a special protection extended to James Taggart, and men whose presence confessed a desire to avoid his hostility—those who represented a hand lowered to pull