

do both. But James Taggart was the road's new president. It was the first year of his administration. He won.

The People's State of Mexico was eager to co-operate, and signed a contract guaranteeing for two hundred years the property right of Taggart Transcontinental to its railroad line in a country where no property rights existed. Francisco d'Anconia had obtained the same guaranty for his mines.

Dagny fought against the building of the San Sebastián Line. She fought by means of whoever would listen to her; but she was only an assistant in the Operating Department, too young, without authority, and nobody listened.

She was unable, then or since, to understand the motives of those who decided to build the line. Sitting as a helpless spectator, a minority member, at one of the Board meetings, she felt a strange evasiveness in the air of the room, in every speech, in every argument, as if the real reason of their decision were never stated, but clear to everyone except herself.

They spoke about the future importance of the trade with Mexico, about a rich stream of freight, about the large revenues assured to the exclusive carrier of an inexhaustible supply of copper. They proved it by citing Francisco d'Anconia's past achievements. They did not mention any mineralogical facts about the San Sebastián Mines. Few facts were available; the information which d'Anconia had released was not very specific; but they did not seem to need facts.

They spoke at great length about the poverty of the Mexicans and their desperate need of railroads. "They've never had a chance." "It is our duty to help an underprivileged nation to develop. A country, it seems to me, is its neighbors' keeper."

She sat, listening, and she thought of the many branch lines which Taggart Transcontinental had had to abandon; the revenues of the great railroad had been falling slowly for many years. She thought of the ominous need of repairs, ominously neglected over the entire system. Their policy on the problem of maintenance was not a policy, but a game they seemed to be playing with a piece of rubber that could be stretched a little, then a little more.

"The Mexicans, it seems to me, are a very diligent people, crushed by their primitive economy. How can they become industrialized if nobody lends them a hand?" "When considering an investment, we should in my opinion, take a chance on human beings, rather than on purely material factors."

She thought of an engine that lay in a ditch beside the Rio Norte Line, because a splice bar had cracked. She thought of the five days when all traffic was stopped on the Rio Norte Line, because a retaining wall had collapsed, pouring tons of rock across the track.

"Since a man must think of the good of his brothers before he thinks of his own, it seems to me that a nation must think of its neighbors before it thinks of itself."

She thought of a newcomer called Ellis Wyatt whom people were beginning to watch, because his activity was the first trickle of a torrent of goods about to burst from the dying stretches of Colorado.

The Rio Norte Line was being allowed to run its way to a final collapse, just when its fullest efficiency was about to be needed and used.

"Material greed isn't everything. There are non-material ideals to consider." "I confess to a feeling of shame when I think that we own a huge network of railways, while the Mexican people have nothing but one or two inadequate lines." "The old theory of economic self-sufficiency has been exploded long ago. It is impossible for one country to prosper in the midst of a starving world."

She thought that to make Taggart Transcontinental what it had been once, long before her time, every available rail, spike and dollar was needed—and how desperately little of it was available.

They spoke also, at the same session, in the same speeches, about the efficiency of the Mexican government that held complete control of everything. Mexico had a great future, they said, and would become a dangerous competitor in a few years. "Mexico's got discipline," the men of the Board kept saying, with a note of envy in their voices.

James Taggart let it be understood—in unfinished sentences and undefined hints—that his friends in Washington, whom he never named, wished to see a railroad line built in Mexico, that such a line would be of great help in matters of international diplomacy, that the good will of public opinion of the world would more than repay Taggart Transcontinental for its investment.

They voted to build the San Sebastián Line at a cost of thirty million dollars.

When Dagny left the Board room and walked through the clean, cold air of the streets, she heard two words repeated clearly, insistently in the numbed emptiness of her mind: Get out . . . Get out . . . Get out.

She listened, aghast. The thought of leaving Taggart Transcontinental did not belong among the things she could hold as conceivable. She felt terror, not at the thought, but at the question of what had made her think it. She shook her head angrily; she told herself that Taggart Transcontinental would now need her more than ever.

Two of the Directors resigned; so did the Vice-President in Charge of Operation. He was replaced by a friend of James Taggart.

Steel rail was laid across the Mexican desert—while orders were issued to reduce the speed of trains on the Rio Norte Line, because the track was shot. A depot of reinforced concrete, with marble columns and mirrors, was built amidst the dust of an unpaved square in a Mexican village—while a train of tank cars carrying oil went hurtling down an embankment and into a blazing junk pile, because a rail had split on the Rio Norte Line. Ellis Wyatt did not wait for the court to decide whether the accident was an act of God, as James Taggart claimed. He transferred the shipping of his oil to the Phoenix-Durango, an obscure railroad which was small and struggling, but struggling well. This was the rocket that sent the Phoenix-Durango on its way. From then on, it grew, as Wyatt Oil grew, as factories grew in nearby valleys—as a band of rails and ties grew, at