

in her office, at seven A.M.; a day she had broken off, uncompleted, to rush home and dress, because she had promised Jim to speak at the dinner of the New York Business Council. "They want us to give them a talk about Rearden Metal," he had said. "You can do it so much better than I. It's very important that we present a good case. There's such a controversy about Rearden Metal."

Sitting beside him in his car, she regretted that she had agreed. She looked at the streets of New York and thought of the race between metal and time, between the rails of the Rio Norte Line and the passing days. She felt as if her nerves were being pulled tight by the stillness of the car, by the guilt of wasting an evening when she could not afford to waste an hour.

"With all those attacks on Rearden that one hears everywhere," said Taggart, "he might need a few friends."

She glanced at him incredulously. "You mean you want to stand by him?"

He did not answer at once; he asked, his voice bleak. "That report of the special committee of the National Council of Metal Industries—what do you think of it?"

"You know what I think of it."

"They said Rearden Metal is a threat to public safety. They said its chemical composition is unsound, it's brittle, it's decomposing molecularly, and it will crack suddenly, without warning . . ." He stopped, as if begging for an answer. She did not answer. He asked anxiously, "You haven't changed your mind about it, have you?"

"About what?"

"About that metal."

"No, Jim, I have not changed my mind."

"They're experts, though . . . the men on that committee . . . Top experts . . . Chief metallurgists for the biggest corporations, with a string of degrees from universities all over the country. . . ." He said it unhappily, as if he were begging her to make him doubt these men and their verdict.

She watched him, puzzled; this was not like him.

The car jerked forward. It moved slowly through a gap in a plank barrier, past the hole of a broken water main. She saw the new pipe stacked by the excavation; the pipe bore a trademark: Stockton Foundry, Colorado. She looked away; she wished she were not reminded of Colorado.

"I can't understand it . . ." said Taggart miserably. "The top experts of the National Council of Metal Industries . . ."

"Who's the president of the National Council of Metal Industries, Jim? Orren Boyle, isn't it?"

Taggart did not turn to her, but his jaw snapped open. "If that fat slob thinks he can—" he started, but stopped and did not finish.

She looked up at a street lamp on the corner. It was a globe of glass filled with light. It hung, secure from storm, lighting boarded windows and cracked sidewalks, as their only guardian. At the end of the street, across the river, against the glow of a factory, she saw the thin tracing of a power station. A truck went by, hiding her view. It was the kind of truck that fed the power station—a tank truck,

its bright new paint impervious to sleet, green with white letters: Wyatt Oil, Colorado.

"Dagny, have you heard about that discussion at the structural steel workers' union meeting in Detroit?"

"No. What discussion?"

"It was in all the newspapers. They debated whether their members should or should not be permitted to work with Rearden Metal. They didn't reach a decision, but that was enough for the contractor who was going to take a chance on Rearden Metal. He cancelled his order, but fast! . . . What if . . . what if everybody decides against it?"

"Let them."

A dot of light was rising in a straight line to the top of an invisible tower. It was the elevator of a great hotel. The car went past the building's alley. Men were moving a heavy, crated piece of equipment from a truck into the basement. She saw the name on the crate: Nielsen Motors, Colorado.

"I don't like that resolution passed by the convention of the grade school teachers of New Mexico," said Taggart.

"What resolution?"

"They resolved that it was their opinion that children should not be permitted to ride on the new Rio Norte Line of Taggart Transcontinental when it's completed, because it is unsafe . . . They said it specifically, the new line of *Taggart Transcontinental*. It was in all the newspapers. It's terrible publicity for us. . . Dagny, what do you think we should do to answer them?"

"Run the first train on the new Rio Norte Line."

He remained silent for a long time. He looked strangely dejected. She could not understand it: he did not gloat, he did not use the opinions of his favorite authorities against her, he seemed to be pleading for reassurance.

A car flashed past them; she had a moment's glimpse of power—a smooth, confident motion and a shining body. She knew the make of the car: Hammond, Colorado.

"Dagny, are we . . . are we going to have that line built . . . on time?"

It was strange to hear a note of plain emotion in his voice, the uncomplicated sound of animal fear.

"God help this city, if we don't!" she answered.

The car turned a corner. Above the black roofs of the city, she saw the page of the calendar, hit by the white glare of a spotlight. It said: January 29.

"Dan Conway is a bastard!"

The words broke out suddenly, as if he could not hold them any longer.

She looked at him, bewildered. "Why?"

"He refused to sell us the Colorado track of the Phoenix-Durango."

"You didn't—" She had to stop. She started again, keeping her voice flat in order not to scream. "You haven't approached him about it?"

"Of course I have!"

"You didn't expect him . . . to sell it . . . to you?"

"Why not?" His hysterically belligerent manner was back. "I offered him more than anybody else did. We wouldn't have had the expense of tearing it up and carting it off, we could have used it as is. And it would have been wonderful publicity for us—that we're giving up the Rearden Metal track in deference to public opinion. It would have been worth every penny of it in good will! But the son of a bitch refused. He's actually declared that not a foot of rail would be sold to Taggart Transcontinental. He's selling it piecemeal to any stray comer, to one-horse railroads in Arkansas or North Dakota, selling it at a loss, way under what I offered him, the bastard! Doesn't even want to take a profit! And you should see those vultures flocking to him! They know they'd never have a chance to get rail anywhere else!"

She sat, her head bowed. She could not bear to look at him.

"I think it's contrary to the intent of the Anti-dog-eat-dog Rule," he said angrily. "I think it was the intent and purpose of the National Alliance of Railroads to protect the essential systems, not the jerk-waters of North Dakota. But I can't get the Alliance to vote on it now, because they're all down there, outbidding one another for that rail!"

She said slowly, as if she wished it were possible to wear gloves to handle the words. "I see why you want me to defend Rearden Metal."

"I don't know what you're—"

"Shut up, Jim," she said quietly.

He remained silent for a moment. Then he drew his head back and drawled defiantly. "You'd better do a good job of defending Rearden Metal, because Bertram Scudder can get pretty sarcastic."

"Bertram Scudder?"

"He's going to be one of the speakers tonight."

"One of the . . . You didn't tell me there were to be other speakers."

"Well . . . I . . . What difference does that make? You're not afraid of him, are you?"

"The New York *Business Council* . . . and you invite Bertram Scudder?"

"Why not? Don't you think it's smart? He doesn't have any hard feelings toward businessmen, not really. He's accepted the invitation. We want to be broad-minded and hear all sides and maybe win him over. . . . Well, what are you staring at? You'll be able to beat him, won't you?"

". . . to beat him?"

"On the air. It's going to be a radio broadcast. You're going to debate with him the question: 'Is Rearden Metal a lethal product of greed?'"

She leaned forward. She pulled open the glass partition of the front seat, ordering, "Stop the car!"

She did not hear what Taggart was saying. She noticed dimly that his voice rose to screams: "They're waiting! . . . Five hundred people