

last event they would ever witness in their community and, perhaps, in their lives.

She walked hastily through the crowd, trying not to look at anyone. Some knew who she was, most of them did not. She saw an old woman with a ragged shawl on her shoulders and the graph of a lifetime's struggle on the cracked skin of her face; the woman's glance was a hopeless appeal for help. An unshaved young man with gold-rimmed glasses stood on a crate under an arc light, yelling to the faces shifting past him, "What do they mean, no business! Look at that train! It's full of passengers! There's plenty of business! It's just that there's no profits for them—that's why they're letting you perish, those greedy parasites!" A disheveled woman rushed up to Dagny, waving two tickets and screaming something about the wrong date. Dagny found herself pushing people out of the way, fighting to reach the end of the train—but an emaciated man, with the staring eyes of years of malicious futility, rushed at her, shouting, "It's all right for *you*, you've got a good overcoat and a private car, but you won't give us any trains, you and all the selfish—!" He stopped abruptly, looking at someone behind her. She felt a hand grasping her elbow: it was Hank Rearden. He held her arm and led her toward her car: seeing the look on his face, she understood why people got out of their way. At the end of the platform, a pallid, plumpish man stood saying to a crying woman, "That's how it's always been in this world. There will be no chance for the poor, until the rich are destroyed." High above the town, hanging in black space like an uncooled planet, the flame of Wyatt's Torch was twisting in the wind.

Rearden went inside her car, but she remained on the steps of the vestibule, delaying the finality of turning away. She heard the "All aboard!" She looked at the people who remained on the platform as one looks at those who watch the departure of the last lifeboat.

The conductor stood below, at the foot of the steps, with his lantern in one hand and his watch in the other. He glanced at the watch, then glanced up at her face. She answered by the silent affirmation of closing her eyes and inclining her head. She saw his lantern circling through the air, as she turned away—and the first jolt of the wheels, on the rails of Rearden Metal, was made easier for her by the sight of Rearden, as she pulled the door open and went into her car.

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When James Taggart telephoned Lillian Rearden from New York and said, "Why, no—no special reason, just wondered how you were and whether you ever came to the city—haven't seen you for ages and just thought we might have lunch together next time you're in New York"—she knew that he had some very special reason in mind.

When she answered lazily, "Oh, let me see—what day is this? April second?—let me look at my calendar—why, it just so happens that I have some shopping to do in New York tomorrow, so I'll be delighted to let you save me my lunch money"—he knew that she had no shopping to do and that the luncheon would be the only purpose of her trip to the city.

They met in a distinguished, high-priced restaurant, much too distinguished and high-priced ever to be mentioned in the gossip columns; not the kind of place which James Taggart, always eager for personal publicity, was in the habit of patronizing; he did not want them to be seen together, she concluded.

The half-hint of half-secret amusement remained on her face while she listened to him talking about their friends, the theater and the weather, carefully building for himself the protection of the unimportant. She sat gracefully not quite straight, as if she were leaning back, enjoying the futility of his performance and the fact that he had to stage it for her benefit. She waited with patient curiosity to discover his purpose.

"I do think that you deserve a pat on the back or a medal or something, Jim," she said, "for being remarkably cheerful in spite of all the messy trouble you're having. Didn't you just close the best branch of your railroad?"

"Oh, it's only a slight financial setback, nothing more. One has to expect retrenchments at a time like this. Considering the general state of the country, we're doing quite well. Better than the rest of them." He added, shrugging, "Besides, it's a matter of opinion whether the Rio Norte Line was our best branch. It is only my sister who thought so. It was her pet project."

She caught the tone of pleasure blurring the drawl of his syllables. She smiled and said, "I see."

Looking up at her from under his lowered forehead, as if stressing that he expected her to understand, Taggart asked, "How is *he* taking it?"

"Who?" She understood quite well.

"Your husband."

"Taking what?"

"The closing of that Line."

She smiled gaily. "Your guess is as good as mine, Jim--and mine is very good indeed."

"What do you mean?"

"You know how he would take it just as you know how your sister is taking it. So your cloud has a double silver lining, hasn't it?"

"What had he been saying in the last few days?"

"He's been away in Colorado for over a week, so I—" She stopped; she had started answering lightly, but she noticed that Taggart's question had been too specific while his tone had been too casual, and she realized that he had struck the first note leading toward the purpose of the luncheon; she paused for the briefest instant, then finished, still more lightly, "so I wouldn't know. But he's coming back any day now."

"Would you say that his attitude is still what one might call recalcitrant?"

"Why, Jim, that would be an understatement!"

"It was to be hoped that events had, perhaps, taught him the wisdom of a mellower approach."

It amused her to keep him in doubt about her understanding. "Oh