knew what it would do to him to see her pick up a silver buffer and go on talking gaily, polishing her fingernails. She was talking about the party. But she did not mention Bertram Scudder—or Dagny Taggart.

What had she sought in marrying him? He felt the presence of some cold, driving purpose within her—but found nothing to condemn. She had never tried to use him. She made no demands on him.

She found no satisfaction in the prestige of industrial power—she spurned it—she preferred her own circle of friends. She was not after money—she spent little—she was indifferent to the kind of extravagance he could have afforded. He had no right to accuse her, he thought, or ever to break the bond. She was a woman of honor in their marriage. She wanted nothing material from him.

He turned and looked at her wearily.

"Next time you give a party," he said, "stick to your own crowd. Don't invite what you think are my friends. I don't care to meet them socially."

She laughed, startled and pleased. "I don't blame you, darling," she said.

He walked out, adding nothing else.

What did she want from him?—he thought. What was she after? In the universe as he knew it, there was no answer.

Chapter VII THE EXPLOITERS AND THE EXPLOITED

The rails rose through the rocks to the oil derricks and the oil derricks rose to the sky. Dagny stood on the bridge, looking up at the crest of the hill where the sun hit a spot of metal on the top of the highest rigging. It looked like a white torch lighted over the snow on the ridges of Wyatt Oil.

By spring, she thought, the track would meet the line growing toward it from Cheyenne: She let her eyes follow the green-blue rails that started from the derricks, came down, went across the bridge and past her. She turned her head to follow them through the miles of clear air, as they went on in great curves hung on the sides of the mountains, far to the end of the new track, where a locomotive crane, like an arm of naked bones and nerves, moved tensely against the sky.

A tractor went past her, loaded with green-blue bolts. The sound of drills came as a steady shudder from far below, where men swung on metal cables, cutting the straight stone drop of the canyon wall to reinforce the abutments of the bridge. Down the track, she could see men working, their arms stiff with the tension of their muscles as they gripped the handles of electric tie tampers.

"Muscles, Miss Taggart," Ben Nealy, the contractor, had said to her, "muscles—that's all it takes to build anything in the world."

No contractor equal to McNamara seemed to exist anywhere. She had taken the best she could find. No engineer on the Taggart staff could be trusted to supervise the job; all of them were skeptical about the new metal. "Frankly, Miss Taggart," her chief engineer

had said, "since it is an experiment that nobody has ever attempted before, I do not think it's fair that it should be my responsibility." "It's mine," she had answered. He was a man in his forties, who still preserved the breezy manner of the college from which he had graduated. Once, Taggart Transcontinental had had a chief engineer, a silent, gray-haired, self-educated man, who could not be matched on any railroad. He had resigned, five years ago.

She glanced down over the bridge. She was standing on a slender beam of steel above a gorge that had cracked the mountains to a depth of fifteen hundred feet. Far at the bottom, she could distinguish the dim outlines of a dry river bed, of piled boulders, of trees contorted by centuries. She wondered whether boulders, tree trunks and muscles could ever bridge that canyon. She wondered why she found herself thinking suddenly that cave-dwellers had lived naked on the bottom of that canyon for ages.

She looked up at the Wyatt oil fields. The track broke into sidings among the wells. She saw the small disks of switches dotted against the snow. They were metal switches, of the kind that were scattered in thousands, unnoticed, throughout the country—but these were sparkling in the sun and the sparks were greenish-blue. What they meant to her was hour upon hour of speaking quietly, evenly, patiently, trying to hit the centerless target that was the person of Mr. Mowen, president of the Amalgamated Switch and Signal Company, Inc., of Connecticut. "But, Miss Taggart, my dear Miss Taggart! My company has served your company for generations, why, your grandfather was the first customer of my grandfather, so you cannot doubt our eagerness to do anything you ask, but—did you say switches made of Rearden Metal?"

"Yes."

"But, Miss Taggart! Consider what it would mean, having to work with that metal. Do you know that the stuff won't melt under less than four thousand degrees? . . .Great? Well, maybe that's great for motor manufacturers, but what I'm thinking of is that it means a new type of furnace, a new process entirely, men to be trained, schedules upset, work rules shot, everything balled up and then God only knows whether it will come out right or not! . . . How do you know, Miss Taggart? How can you know, when it's never been done before? . . Well, I can't say that that metal is good and I can't say that it isn't. . . . Well, no, I can't tell whether it's a product of genius, as you say, or just another fraud as a great many people are saying, Miss Taggart, a great many. . . . Well, no, I can't say that it does matter one way or the other, because who am I to take a chance on a job of this kind?"

She had doubled the price of her order. Rearden had sent two metallurgists to train Mowen's men, to teach, to show, to explain every step of the process, and had paid the salaries of Mowen's men while they were being trained.

She looked at the spikes in the rail at her feet. They meant the night when she had heard that Summit Casting of Illinois, the only company willing to make spikes of Rearden Metal, had gone bankrupt, with half of her order undelivered. She had flown to Chicago,