

tempt for the duty of making speeches. He was clutching a sheaf of typewritten pages, as if it were a bundle of old clothing about to be discarded.

James Taggart caught him in mid-step, to say uncertainly and loudly, "Mr. Thompson, may I present my sister, Miss Dagny Taggart?"

"So nice of you to come, Miss Taggart," said Mr. Thompson, shaking her hand as if she were another voter from back home whose name he had never heard before; then he marched briskly off.

"Where's the conference, Jim?" she asked, and glanced at the clock: it was a huge white dial with a black hand slicing the minutes, like a knife moving toward the hour of eight.

"I can't help it! I don't run this show!" he snapped.

Eddie Willers glanced at her with a look of bitterly patient astonishment, and stepped closer to her side.

A radio receiver was playing a program of military marches broadcast from another studio, half-drowning the fragments of nervous voices, of hastily aimless steps, of screeching machinery being pulled to focus upon the drawing-room set.

"Stay tuned to hear Mr. Thompson's report on the world crisis at eight PM!" cried the martial voice of an announcer, from the radio-receiver--when the hand on the dial reached the hour of 7:45.

"Step on it, boys, step on it!" snapped Mr. Thompson, while the radio burst into another march.

It was 7:50 when Chick Morrison, the Morale Conditioner, who seemed to be in charge, cried, "All right, boys and girls, all right, let's take our places!" waving a bunch of notepaper, like a baton, toward the light-flooded circle of armchairs.

Mr. Thompson thudded down upon the central chair, in the manner of grabbing a vacant seat in a subway.

Chick Morrison's assistants were herding the crowd toward the circle of light.

"A happy family," Chick Morrison explained, "the country must see us as a big, united, happy-- What's the matter with that thing?" The radio music had gone off abruptly, choking on an odd little gasp of static, cut in the middle of a ringing phrase. It was 7:51. He shrugged and went on: "--happy family. Hurry up, boys. Take close-ups of Mr. Thompson, first."

The hand of the clock went slicing off the minutes, while press photographers clicked their cameras at Mr. Thompson's sourly impatient face.

"Mr. Thompson will sit between science and industry!" Chick Morrison announced. "Dr. Stadler, please--the chair on Mr. Thompson's left. Miss Taggart--this way, please--on Mr. Thompson's right."

Dr. Stadler obeyed. She did not move.

"It's not just for the press, it's for the television audiences," Chick Morrison explained to her, in the tone of an inducement.

She made a step forward. "I will not take part in this program," she said evenly, addressing Mr. Thompson.

"You won't?" he asked blankly, with the kind of look he would

have worn if one of the flower vases had suddenly refused to perform its parts.

"Dagny, for Christ's sake!" cried James Taggart in panic.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Mr. Thompson.

"But, Miss Taggart! Why?" cried Chick Morrison.

"You all know why," she said to the faces around her. "You should have known better than to try that again."

"Miss Taggart!" yelled Chick Morrison, as she turned to go. "It's a national emergency—"

Then a man came rushing toward Mr. Thompson, and she stopped, as did everyone else—and the look on the man's face swept the crowd into an abruptly total silence. He was the station's chief engineer, and it was odd to see a look of primitive terror struggling against his remnant of civilized control.

"Mr. Thompson," he said, "we . . . we might have to delay the broadcast."

"What?" cried Mr. Thompson.

The hand of the dial stood at 7:58.

"We're trying to fix it. Mr. Thompson, we're trying to find out what it is . . . but we might not be on time and—"

"What are you talking about? What happened?"

"We're trying to locate the—"

"What happened?"

"I don't know! But . . . We . . . we can't get on the air. Mr. Thompson."

There was a moment of silence, then Mr. Thompson asked, his voice unnaturally low. "Are you crazy?"

"I must be. I wish I were. I can't make it out. The station is dead."

"Mechanical trouble?" yelled Mr. Thompson, leaping to his feet. "Mechanical trouble, God damn you, at a time like this? If that's how you run this station—"

The chief engineer shook his head slowly, in the manner of an adult who is reluctant to frighten a child. "It's not this station, Mr. Thompson," he said softly. "It's every station in the country, as far as we've been able to check. And there is no mechanical trouble. Neither here nor elsewhere. The equipment is in order, in perfect order, and they all report the same, but . . . but all radio stations went off the air at seven-fifty-one, and . . . and nobody can discover why."

"But—" cried Mr. Thompson, stopped, glanced about him and screamed, "Not tonight! You can't let it happen tonight! You've got to get me on the air!"

"Mr. Thompson," the man said slowly, "we've called the electronic laboratory of the State Science Institute. They . . . they've never seen anything like it. They said it might be a natural phenomenon, some sort of cosmic disturbance of an unprecedented kind, only—"

"Well?"

"Only they don't think it is. We don't, either. They said it looks like radio waves, but of a frequency never produced before, never observed anywhere, never discovered by anybody."

No one answered him. In a moment, he went on, his voice oddly

solemn: "It looks like a wall of radio waves jamming the air, and we can't get through it, we can't touch it, we can't break it. . . . What's more, we can't locate its source, not by any of our usual methods. . . . Those waves seem to come from a transmitter that . . . that makes any known to us look like a child's toy!"

"But that's not possible!" The cry came from behind Mr. Thompson and they all whirled in its direction, startled by its note of peculiar terror; it came from Dr. Stadler. "There's no such thing! There's nobody on earth to make it!"

The chief engineer spread his hands out. "That's it, Dr. Stadler," he said wearily. "It can't be possible. It shouldn't be possible. But there it is."

"Well, do something about it!" cried Mr. Thompson to the crowd at large.

No one answered or moved.

"I won't permit this!" cried Mr. Thompson. "I won't permit it! Tonight of all nights! I've got to make that speech! Do something! Solve it, whatever it is! I order you to solve it!"

The chief engineer was looking at him blankly.

"I'll fire the lot of you for this! I'll fire every electronic engineer in the country! I'll put the whole profession on trial for sabotage, desertion and treason! Do you hear me? Now do something. God damn you! Do something!"

The chief engineer was looking at him impassively, as if words were not conveying anything any longer.

"Isn't there anybody to obey an order?" cried Mr. Thompson. "Isn't there a brain left in this country?"

The hand of the clock reached the dot of 8:00.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said a voice that came from the radio receiver—a man's clear, calm, implacable voice, the kind of voice that had not been heard on the airwaves for years—"Mr. Thompson will not speak to you tonight. His time is up. I have taken it over. You were to hear a report on the world crisis. That is what you are going to hear."

Three gasps of recognition greeted the voice, but nobody had the power to notice them among the sounds of the crowd, which were beyond the stage of cries. One was a gasp of triumph, another—of terror, the third—of bewilderment. Three persons had recognized the speaker: Dagny, Dr. Stadler, Eddie Willers. Nobody glanced at Eddie Willers; but Dagny and Dr. Stadler glanced at each other. She saw that his face was distorted by as evil a terror as one could ever bear to see; he saw that she knew and that the way she looked at him was as if the speaker had slapped his face.

"For twelve years, you have been asking: Who is John Galt? This is John Galt speaking. I am the man who loves his life. I am the man who does not sacrifice his love or his values. I am the man who has deprived you of victims and thus has destroyed your world, and if you wish to know why you are perishing—you who dread knowledge—I am the man who will now tell you."

The chief engineer was the only one able to move; he ran to a television set and struggled frantically with its dials. But the screen