"If you don't appear after all those announcements, it will support the rumors, it will amount to an open declaration of disloyalty!"

"The trap won't work, Jim."

"What trap?"

"The one you're always setting up."

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Yes, you do. You knew--all of you knew it—that I would refuse. So you pushed me into a public trap, where my refusal would become an embarrassing scandal for you, more embarrassing than you thought I'd dare to cause. You were counting on me to save your faces and the necks you stuck out. I won't save them."

"But I promised it!"

"I didn't."

"But we can't refuse them! Don't you see that they've got us hogtied? That they're holding us by the throat? Don't you know what they can do to us through this Railroad Pool, or through the Unification Board, or through the moratorium on our bonds?"

"I knew that two years ago."

He was shaking; there was some formless, desperate, almost superstitious quality in his terror, out of proportion to the dangers he named. She felt suddenly certain that it came from something deeper than his fear of bureaucratic reprisal, that the reprisal was the only identification of it which he would permit himself to know, a reassuring identification which had a semblance of rationality and hid his true motive. She felt certain that it was not the country's panic he wanted to stave off, but his own—that he, and Chick Morrison and Wesley Mouch and all the rest of the looting crew needed her sanction, not to reassure their victims, but to reassure themselves, though the allegedly crafty, the allegedly practical idea of deluding their victims was the only identification they gave to their own motive and their hysterical insistence. With an awed contempt—awed by the enormity of the sight—she wondered what inner degradation those men had to reach in order to arrive at a level of self-deception where they would seek the extorted approval of an unwilling victim as the moral sanction they needed, they who thought that they were merely deceiving the world.

"We have no choice!" he cried. "Nobody has any choice!"

"Get out of here," she said, her voice very quiet and low.

Some tonal quality in the sound of her voice struck the note of the unconfessed within him, as if, never allowing it into words, he knew from what knowledge that sound had come. He got out.

She glanced at Eddie; he looked like a man worn by fighting one more of the attacks of disgust which he was learning to endure as a chronic condition.

After a moment, he asked, "Dagny, what became of Quentin Daniels? You were flying after him, weren't you?"

"Yes," she said. "He's gone."

"To the destroyer?"

The word hit her like a physical blow. It was the first touch of the outer world upon that radiant presence which she had kept within her all day, as a silent, changeless vision, a private vision, not to be

affected by any of the things around her, not to be thought about, only to be felt as the source of her strength. The destroyer, she realized, was the name of that vision, here, in their world.

"Yes," she said dully, with effort, "to the destroyer."

Then she closed her hands over the edge of the desk, to steady her purpose and her posture, and said, with the bitter hint of a smile, "Well, Eddie, let's see what two impractical persons, like you and me, can do about preventing the train wrecks."

It was two hours later—when she was alone at her desk, bent over sheets of paper that bore nothing but figures, yet were like a motion-picture film unrolling to tell her the whole story of the railroad in the past four weeks—that the buzzer rang and her secretary's voice said, "Mrs. Rearden to see you, Miss Taggart."

"*Mr.* Rearden?" she asked incredulously, unable to believe either.

"No. *Mrs.* Rearden."

She let a moment pass, then said, "Please ask her to come in."

There was some peculiar touch of emphasis in Lillian Rearden's bearing when she entered and walked toward the desk. She wore a tailored suit, with a loose, bright bow hanging casually sidewise for a note of elegant incongruity, and a small hat tilted at an angle considered smart by virtue of being considered amusing; her face was a shade too smooth, her steps a shade too slow, and she walked almost as if she were swinging her hips.

"How do you do, Miss Taggart," she said in a lazily gracious voice, a drawing-room voice which seemed to strike, in that office, the same style of incongruity as her suit and her bow.

Dagny inclined her head gravely.

Lillian glanced about the office, her glance had the same style of amusement as her hat: an amusement purporting to express maturity by the conviction that life could be nothing but ridiculous.

"Please sit down," said Dagny.

Lillian sat down, relaxing into a confident, gracefully casual posture. When she turned her face to Dagny, the amusement was still there, but its shading was now different. it seemed to suggest that they shared a secret, which would make her presence here seem preposterous to the world, but self evidently logical to the two of them. She stressed it by remaining silent.

"What can I do for you?"

"I came to tell you," said Lillian pleasantly, "that you will appear on Bertram Scudder's broadcast tonight."

She detected no astonishment in Dagny's face, no shock, only the glance of an engineer studying a motor that makes an irregular sound. "I assume," said Dagny, "that you are fully aware of the form of your sentence."

"Oh yes!" said Lillian.

"Then proceed to support it."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Proceed to tell me."

Lillian gave a brief little laugh, its forced brevity betraying that this was not quite the attitude she had expected. "I am sure that no lengthy explanation will be necessary," she said. "You know why

your appearance on that broadcast is important to those in power. I know why you have refused to appear. I know your convictions on the subject. You may have attached no importance to it, but you do know that my sympathy has always been on the side of the system now in power. Therefore, you will understand my interest in the issue and my place in it. When your brother told me that you had refused, I decided to take a hand in the matter—because, you see, I am one of the very few who know that you are not in a position to refuse."

"I am not one of those few, as yet," said Dagny.

Lillian smiled. "Well, yes, I must explain a little further. You realize that your radio appearance will have the same value for those in power as—as the action of my husband when he signed the Gift Certificate that turned Rearden Metal over to them. You know how frequently and how usefully they have been mentioning it in all of their propaganda."

"I didn't know that," said Dagny sharply.

"Oh, of course, you have been away for most of the last two months, so you might have missed the constant reminder—in the press, on the radio, in public speeches—that even Hank Rearden approves of and supports Directive 10-289, since he has voluntarily signed his Metal over to the nation. Even Hank Rearden That discourages a great many recalcitrants and helps to keep them in line." She leaned back and asked in the tone of a casual aside, "Have you ever asked him why he signed?"

Dagny did not answer: she did not seem to hear that it was a question: she sat still and her face was expressionless, but her eyes seemed too large and they were fixed on Lillian's, as if she were now intent upon nothing but hearing Lillian to the end.

"No, I didn't think you knew it. I didn't think that he would ever tell you," said Lillian, her voice smoother, as if recognizing the signposts and sliding comfortably down the anticipated course "Yet you must learn the reason that made him sign—because it is the same reason that will make you appear on Bertram Scudder's broadcast tonight."

She paused, wishing to be urged. Dagny waited.

"It is a reason," said Lillian, "which should please you—as far as my husband's action is concerned. Consider what that signature meant to him Rearden Metal was his greatest achievement, the summation of the best in his life, the final symbol of his pride— and my husband, as you have reason to know, is an extremely passionate man, his pride in himself being, perhaps, his greatest passion. Rearden Metal was more than an achievement to him, it was the symbol of his ability to achieve, of his independence, of his struggle, of his rise It was his property, his by right—and you know what rights mean to a man as strict as he, and what property means to a man as possessive. He would have gladly died to defend it, rather than surrender it to the men he despised. This is what it meant to him—and this is what he gave up. You will be glad to know that he gave it up for *your* sake, Miss Taggart. For the sake of your reputation and your honor. He signed the Gift Certificate surrendering Rearden