When Mr. Weatherby's voice came on the wire, it sounded cautious: "Yes, Miss Taggart? Of what service can I be to you?"

"You can tell your boss that if he doesn't want me to quit again, as he knows I did, he is never to call me or speak to me. Anything your gang has to tell me, let them send *you* to tell it. I'll speak to you, but not to him. You may tell him that my reason is what he did to Hank Rearden when he was on Rearden's payroll. If everybody else has forgotten it, I haven't."

"It is my duty to assist the nation's railroads at any time, Miss Taggart." Mr. Weatherby sounded as if he were trying to avoid the commitment of having heard what he had heard; but a sudden note of interest crept into his voice as he asked slowly, thoughtfully, with guarded shrewdness, "Am I to understand, Miss Taggart, that it is your wish to deal exclusively with *me* in all official matters? May I take this as your policy?"

She gave a brief, harsh chuckle. "Go ahead," she said. "You may list me as your exclusive property, use me as a special item of pull, and trade me all over Washington. But I don't know what good that will do you, because I'm not going to play the game, I'm not going to trade favors, I'm simply going to start breaking your laws right now—and you can arrest me when you feel that you can afford to."

"I believe that you have an old-fashioned idea about law, Miss Taggart. Why speak of rigid, unbreakable laws? Our modern laws are elastic and open to interpretation according to . . . circumstances."

"Then start being elastic right now, because I'm not and neither are railroad catastrophes."

She hung up, and said to Eddie, in the tone of an estimate passed on physical objects, "They'll leave us alone for a while."

She did not seem to notice the changes in her office: the absence of Nat Taggart's portrait, the new glass coffee table where Mr. Locey had spread, for the benefit of visitors, a display of the loudest humanitarian magazines with titles of articles headlined on their covers.

She heard—with the attentive look of a machine equipped to record, not to react—Eddie's account of what one month had done to the railroad. She heard his report on what he guessed about the causes of the catastrophe. She faced, with the same look of detachment, a succession of men who went in and out of her office with overhurried steps and hands fumbling in superfluous gestures. He thought that she had become impervious to anything. But suddenly—while pacing the office, dictating to him a list of track-laying materials and where to obtain them illegally—she stopped and looked down at the magazines on the coffee table. Their headlines said: "The New Social Conscience," "Our Duty to the Underprivileged," "Need versus Greed." With a single movement of her arm, the abrupt, explosive movement of sheer physical brutality, such as he had never seen from her before, she swept the magazines off the table and went on, her voice reciting a list of figures without a break, as if there were no connection between her mind and the violence of her body.

Late in the afternoon, finding a moment alone in her office, she telephoned Hank Rearden.

She gave her name to his secretary—and she heard, in the way he said it, the haste with which he had seized the receiver: "Dagny?"

"Hello, Hank. I'm back."

"Where?"

"In my office."

She heard the things he did not say, in the moment's silence on the wire, then he said, "I suppose I'd better start bribing people at once to get the ore to start pouring rail for you."

"Yes. As much of it as you can. It doesn't have to be Rearden Metal. It can be—" The break in her voice was almost too brief to notice, but what it held was the thought: Rearden Metal rail for going back to the time before heavy steel?—perhaps back to the time of wooden rails with strips of iron? "It can be steel, any weight, anything you can give me."

"All right. Dagny, do you know that I've surrendered Rearden Metal to them? I've signed the Gift Certificate."

"Yes, I know."

"I've given in."

"Who am I to blame you? Haven't I?" He did not answer, and she said, "Hank, I don't think they care whether there's a train or a blast furnace left on earth. We do. They're holding us by our love of it, and we'll go on paying so long as there's still one chance left to keep one single wheel alive and moving in token of human intelligence. We'll go on holding it afloat, like our drowning child, and when the flood swallows it, we'll go down with the last wheel and the last syllogism. I know what we're paying, but—price is no object any longer."

"I know."

"Don't be afraid for me, Hank. I'll be all right by tomorrow morning."

"I'll never be afraid for you, darling. I'll see you tonight."

Chapter IX THE FACE WITHOUT PAIN OR FEAR OR GUILT

The silence of her apartment and the motionless perfection of objects that had remained just as she had left them a month before, struck her with a sense of relief and desolation together, when she entered her living room. The silence gave her an illusion of privacy and ownership; the sight of the objects reminded her that they were preserving a moment she could not recapture, as she could not undo the events that had happened since.

There was still a remnant of daylight beyond the windows. She had left the office earlier than she intended, unable to summon the effort for any task that could be postponed till morning. This was new to her—and it was new that she should now feel more at home in her apartment than in her office.

She took a shower, and stood for long, blank minutes, letting the water run over her body, but stepped out hastily when she realized