Metal—under the threat that the adultery he was carrying on with you would be exposed to the eyes of the world. Oh yes, we had full proof of it, in every intimate detail. I believe that you hold a philosophy which disapproves of sacrifice—but in this case, you are most certainly a woman, so I'm sure that you will feel gratification at the magnitude of the sacrifice a man has made for the privilege of using your body. You have undoubtedly taken great pleasure in the nights which he spent in your bed. You may now take pleasure in the knowledge of what those nights have cost him. And since—you like bluntness, don't you, Miss Taggart?—since your chosen status is that of a whore, I take my hat off to you in regard to the price you exacted, which none of your sisters could ever have hoped to match."

Lillian's voice had kept growing reluctantly sharper, like a drill-head that kept breaking by being unable to find the line of the fault in the stone. Dagny was still looking at her, but the intensity had vanished from Dagny's eyes and posture. Lillian wondered why she felt as if Dagny's face were hit by a spotlight. She could detect no particular expression, it was simply a face in natural repose—and the clarity seemed to come from its structure, from the precision of its sharp planes, the firmness of the mouth, the steadiness of the eyes. She could not decipher the expression of the eyes, it seemed incongruous, it resembled the calm, not of a woman, but of a scholar, it had that peculiar, luminous quality which is the fearlessness of satisfied knowledge.

"It was I," said Lillian softly, "who informed the bureaucrats about my husband's adultery."

Dagny noticed the first flicker of feeling in Lillian's lifeless eyes: it resembled pleasure, but so distantly that it looked like sunlight reflected from the dead surface of the moon to the stagnant water of a swamp; it flickered for an instant and went.

"It was I," said Lillian, "who took Rearden Metal away from him." It sounded almost like a plea.

It was not within the power of Dagny's consciousness ever to understand that plea or to know what response Lillian had hoped to find; she knew only that she had not found it, when she heard the sudden shrillness of Lillian's voice. "Have you understood me?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what I demand and why you'll obey me. You thought you were invincible, you and he, didn't you?" The voice was attempting smoothness, but it was jerking unevenly. "You have always acted on no will but your own—a luxury I have not been able to afford. For once and in compensation, I will see you acting on mine. You can't fight me. You can't buy your way out of it, with those dollars which you're able to make and I'm not. There's no profit you can offer me—I'm devoid of greed. I'm not paid by the bureaucrats for doing this—I am doing it without gain. Without gain. Do you understand me?"

"Yes."

"Then no further explanations are necessary, only the reminder that all the factual evidence—hotel registers, jewelry bills and stuff like that—is still in the possession of the right persons and will be

broadcast on every radio program tomorrow, unless you appear on one radio program tonight. Is this clear?"

"Yes."

"Now what is your answer?" She saw the luminous scholar-eyes looking at her, and suddenly she felt as if too much of her were seen and as if she were not seen at all.

"I am glad that you have told me," said Dagny. "I will appear on Bertram Scudder's broadcast tonight."

* *

There was a beam of white light beating down upon the glittering metal of a microphone—in the center of a glass cage imprisoning her with Bertram Scudder. The sparks of glitter were greenish-blue; the microphone was made of Rearden Metal.

Above them, beyond a sheet of glass, she could distinguish a booth with two rows of faces looking down at her: the lax, anxious face of James Taggart, with Lillian Rearden beside him, her hand resting reassuringly on his arm—a man who had arrived by plane from Washington and had been introduced to her as Chick Morrison—and a group of young men from his staff, who talked about percentage curves of intellectual influence and acted like motorcycle cops.

Bertram Scudder seemed to be afraid of her. He clung to the microphone, spitting words into its delicate mesh, into the ears of the country, introducing the subject of his program. He was laboring to sound cynical, skeptical, superior and hysterical together, to sound like a man who sneers at the vanity of all human beliefs and thereby demands an instantaneous belief from his listeners. A small patch of moisture glistened on the back of his neck. He was describing in overcolored detail her month of convalescence in the lonely cabin of a sheepherder, then her heroic trudging down fifty miles of mountain trails for the sake of resuming her duties to the people in this grave hour of national emergency

". . . And if any of you have been deceived by vicious rumors aimed to undermine your faith in the great social program of our leaders—you may trust the word of Miss Taggart, who—"

She stood, looking up at the white beam. Specks of dust were whirling in the beam and she noticed that one of them was alive: it was a gnat with a tiny sparkle in place of its beating wings, it was struggling for some frantic purpose of its own, and she watched it, feeling as distant from its purpose as from that of the world.

". . . Miss Taggart is an impartial observer, a brilliant businesswoman who has often been critical of the government in the past and who may be said to represent the extreme, conservative viewpoint held by such giants of industry as Hank Rearden. Yet even she—"

She wondered at how easy it felt, when one did not have to feel; she seemed to be standing naked on public display, and a beam of light was enough to support her, because there was no weight of pain in her, no hope, no regret, no concern, no future.

". . . And now, ladies and gentlemen, I will present to you the heroine of this night, our most uncommon guest, the—"

Pain came back to her in a sudden, piercing stab, like a long