

"I cannot take too much of your time, Dr. Stadler." She spoke with polite, impersonal precision. "And the matter I came to discuss is extremely important."

He laughed. "There's a sign of the businessman—wanting to come to the point at once. Well, by all means. But don't worry about my time—it's yours. Now, what was it you said you wanted to discuss? Oh yes. Rearden Metal. Not exactly one of the subjects on which I'm best informed, but if there's anything I can do for you—" His hand moved in a gesture of invitation.

"Do you know the statement issued by this Institute in regard to Rearden Metal?"

He frowned slightly. "Yes, I've heard about it."

"Have you read it?"

"No."

"It was intended to prevent the use of Rearden Metal."

"Yes, yes, I gathered that much."

"Could you tell me why?"

He spread his hands; they were attractive hands—long and bony, beautiful in their suggestion of nervous energy and strength. "I really wouldn't know. That is the province of Dr. Ferris. I'm sure he had his reasons. Would you like to speak to Dr. Ferris?"

"No. Are you familiar with the metallurgical nature of Rearden Metal, Dr. Stadler?"

"Why, yes, a little. But tell me, why are you concerned about it?"

A flicker of astonishment rose and died in her eyes; she answered without change in the impersonal tone of her voice, "I am building a branch line with rails of Rearden Metal, which—"

"Oh, but of course! I did hear something about it. You must forgive me, I don't read the newspapers as regularly as I should. It's *your* railroad that's building that new branch, isn't it?"

"The existence of my railroad depends upon the completion of that branch—and, I think, eventually, the existence of this country will depend on it as well."

The wrinkles of amusement deepened about his eyes. "Can you make such a statement with positive assurance, Miss Taggart? I couldn't."

"In this case?"

"In any case. Nobody can tell what the course of a country's future may be. It is not a matter of calculable trends, but a chaos subject to the rule of the moment, in which anything is possible."

"Do you think that production is necessary to the existence of a country, Dr. Stadler?"

"Why, yes, yes, of course."

"The building of our branch line has been stopped by the statement of this Institute."

He did not smile and he did not answer.

"Does that statement represent your conclusion about the nature of Rearden Metal?" she asked.

"I have said that I have not read it." There was an edge of sharpness in his voice.

She opened her bag, took out a newspaper clipping and extended

it to him. "Would you read it and tell me whether this is a language which science may properly speak?"

He glanced through the clipping, smiled contemptuously and tossed it aside with a gesture of distaste. "Disgusting, isn't it?" he said. "But what can you do when you deal with people?"

She looked at him, not understanding. "You do not approve of that statement?"

He shrugged. "My approval or disapproval would be irrelevant."

"Have you formed a conclusion of your own about Rearden Metal?"

"Well, metallurgy is not exactly—what shall we say?—my specialty."

"Have you examined any data on Rearden Metal?"

"Miss Taggart, I don't see the point of your questions." His voice sounded faintly impatient.

"I would like to know your personal verdict on Rearden Metal."

"For what purpose?"

"So that I may give it to the press."

He got up. "That is quite impossible."

She said, her voice strained with the effort of trying to force understanding, "I will submit to you all the information necessary to form a conclusive judgment."

"I cannot issue any public statements about it."

"Why not?"

"The situation is much too complex to explain in a casual discussion."

"But if you should find that Rearden Metal is, in fact, an extremely valuable product which—"

"That is beside the point."

"The value of Rearden Metal is beside the point?"

"There are other issues involved, besides questions of fact."

She asked, not quite believing that she had heard him right, "What other issues is science concerned with, besides questions of fact?"

The bitter lines of his mouth sharpened into the suggestion of a smile. "Miss Taggart, you do not understand the problems of scientists."

She said slowly, as if she were seeing it suddenly in time with her words, "I believe that you do know what Rearden Metal really is."

He shrugged. "Yes. I know. From such information as I've seen, it appears to be a remarkable thing. Quite a brilliant achievement—as far as technology is concerned." He was pacing impatiently across the office. "In fact, I should like, some day, to order a special laboratory motor that would stand just such high temperatures as Rearden Metal can take. It would be very valuable in connection with certain phenomena I should like to observe. I have found that when particles are accelerated to a speed approaching the speed of light, they—"

"Dr. Stadler," she asked slowly, "you know the truth, yet you will not state it publicly?"

"Miss Taggart, you are using an abstract term, when we are dealing with a matter of practical reality."

"We are dealing with a matter of science "

"Science? Aren't you confusing the standards involved? It is only in the realm of pure science that truth is an absolute criterion. When we deal with applied science, with technology—we deal with people. And when we deal with people, considerations other than truth enter the question."

"What considerations?"

"I am not a technologist, Miss Taggart. I have no talent or taste for dealing with people. I cannot become involved in so-called practical matters."

"That statement was issued in your name."

"I had nothing to do with it!"

"The name of this Institute is your responsibility."

"That's a perfectly unwarranted assumption."

"People think that the honor of your name is the guarantee behind any action of this Institute."

"I can't help what people think—if they think at all!"

"They accepted your statement. It was a lie."

"How can one deal in truth when one deals with the public?"

"I don't understand you," she said very quietly.

"Questions of truth do not enter into social issues. No principles have ever had any effect on society."

"What, then, directs men's actions?"

He shrugged. "The expediency of the moment."

"Dr. Stadler," she said, "I think I must tell you the meaning and the consequences of the fact that the construction of my branch line is being stopped. I am stopped, in the name of public safety, because I am using the best rail ever produced. In six months, if I do not complete that line, the best industrial section of the country will be left without transportation. It will be destroyed, because it was the best and there were men who thought it expedient to seize a share of its wealth."

"Well, that may be vicious, unjust, calamitous—but such is life in society. Somebody is always sacrificed, as a rule unjustly; there is no other way to live among men. What can any one person do?"

"You can state the truth about Rearden Metal."

He did not answer.

"I could beg you to do it in order to save me. I could beg you to do it in order to avert a national disaster. But I won't. These may not be valid reasons. There is only one reason: you must say it, because it is true."

"I was not consulted about that statement!" The cry broke out involuntarily. "I wouldn't have allowed it! I don't like it any better than you do! But I can't issue a public denial!"

"You were not consulted? Then shouldn't you want to find out the reasons behind that statement?"

"I can't destroy the Institute now!"

"Shouldn't you want to find out the reasons?"

"I know the reasons! They won't tell me, but I know. And I can't say that I blame them, either."

"Would you tell me?"

"I'll tell you, if you wish. It's the truth that you want, isn't it? Dr.