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She stood defiantly still, because the way he looked at her demanded an angry escape. She stood as she always did, straight and taut, her head lifted impatiently. It was the unfeminine pose of an executive. But her naked shoulder betrayed the fragility of the body under the black dress, and the pose made her most truly a woman. The proud strength became a challenge to someone's superior strength, and the fragility a reminder that the challenge could be broken. She was not conscious of it. She had met no one able to see it.

He said, looking down at her body, "Dagny, what a magnificent waste!"

She had to turn and escape. She felt herself blushing for the first time in years: blushing because she new suddenly that the sentence named what she had felt all evening.

She had started walking, cautiously, very slowly. She heard Lillian's words and stopped. Lillian had said it many times this evening, in answer to the same questions, but it was the first time that Dagny heard it.

"This?" Lillian was saying, extending her arm with the metal bracelet for the inspection of two smartly groomed women. "Why? My dear, it's the first thing ever made of Rearden Metal."

Dagny did not see the room. She did not hear the music. She felt the pressure of dead stillness against her eardrums. She did not know the moment that preceded, or the moments that were to follow. She did not know those involved, neither herself, nor Lillian, nor Rearden, nor the meaning of her own action. It was a single instant, blasted out of context. She had heard. She was looking at the bracelet of green-blue metal.

She felt the movement of something being torn off her wrist, and she heard her own voice saying in the great stillness, very calmly, a voice cold as a skeleton, naked of emotion, "If you are not the coward that I think you are, you will exchange it."

On the palm of her hand, she was extending her diamond bracelet to Lillian.

"You're not serious, Miss Taggart?" said a woman's voice.

It was not Lillian's voice. Lillian's eyes were looking straight at her.

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