months that the party would take place tonight, as Lillian wished. He had promised it to her, safe in the knowledge that the party was a long way off and that he would attend to it, when the time came, as he attended to every duty on his overloaded schedule. Then, during three months of eighteen-hour workdays, he had forgotten it happily—until half an hour ago, when, long past dinner time, his secretary had entered his office and said firmly, "Your party, Mr. Rearden." He had cried, "Good God!" leaping to his feet; he had hurried home, rushed up the stairs, started tearing his clothes off and gone through the routine of dressing, conscious only of the need to hurry, not of the purpose. When the full realization of the purpose struck him like a sudden blow, he stopped.

"You don't care for anything but business." He had heard it all his life, pronounced as a verdict of damnation. He had always known that business was regarded as some sort of secret, shameful cult, which one did not impose on innocent laymen, that people thought of it as of an ugly necessity, to be performed but never mentioned, that to talk shop was an offense against higher sensibilities, that just as one washed machine grease off one's hands before coming home, so one was supposed to wash the stain of business off one's mind before entering a drawing room. He had never held that creed, but he had accepted it as natural that his family should hold it. He took it for granted—wordlessly, in the manner of a feeling absorbed in childhood, left unquestioned and unnamed—that he had dedicated himself, like the martyr of some dark religion, to the service of a faith which was his passionate love, but which made him an outcast among men, whose sympathy he was not to expect.

He had accepted the tenet that it was his duty to give his wife some form of existence unrelated to business. But he had never found the capacity to do it or even to experience a sense of guilt. He could neither force himself to change nor blame her if she chose to condemn him.

He had given Lillian none of his time for months—no, he thought, for years; for the eight years of their marriage. He had no interest to spare for her interests, not even enough to learn just what they were. She had a large circle of friends, and he had heard it said that their names represented the heart of the country's culture, but he had never had time to meet them or even to acknowledge their fame by knowing what achievements had earned it. He knew only that he often saw their names on the magazine covers on newsstands. If Lillian resented his attitude, he thought, she was right. If her manner toward him was objectionable, he deserved it. If his family called him heartless, it was true.

He had never spared himself in any issue. When a problem came up at the mills, his first concern was to discover what error he had made; he did not search for anyone's fault but his own; it was of himself that he demanded perfection. He would grant himself no mercy now; he took the blame. But at the mills, it prompted him to action in an immediate impulse to correct the error; now, it had no effect. . . . Just a few more minutes, he thought, standing against the mirror, his eyes closed.

He could not stop the thing in his mind that went on throwing words at him; it was like trying to plug a broken hydrant with his bare hands. Stinging jets, part words, part pictures, kept shooting at his brain. . . . Hours of it, he thought, hours to spend watching the eyes of the guests getting heavy with boredom if they were sober or glazing into an imbecile stare if they weren't, and pretend that he noticed neither, and strain to think of something to say to them, when he had nothing to say—while he needed hours of inquiry to find a successor for the superintendent of his rolling mills who had resigned suddenly, without explanation—he had to do it at once—men of that sort were so hard to find—and if anything happened to break the flow of the rolling mills—it was the Taggart rail that was being rolled. . . . He remembered the silent reproach, the look of accusation, long-bearing patience and scorn, which he always saw in the eyes of his family when they caught some evidence of his passion for his business—and the futility of his silence, of his hope that they would not think Rearden Steel meant as much to him as it did—like a drunkard pretending indifference to liquor, among people who watch him with the scornful amusement of their full knowledge of his shameful weakness. . . . "I heard you last night coming home at two in the morning, where were you?" his mother saying to him at the dinner table, and Lillian answering, "Why, at the mills, of course," as another wife would say, "At the corner saloon." . . . Or Lillian asking him, the hint of a wise half-smile on her face, "What were you doing in New York yesterday?" "It was a banquet with the boys." "Business?" "Yes." "*Of course*"—and Lillian turning away, nothing more, except the shameful realization that he had almost hoped she would think he had attended some sort of obscene stag party. . . . An ore carrier had gone down in a storm on Lake Michigan, with thousands of tons of Rearden ore—those boats were falling apart—if he didn't take it upon himself to help them obtain the replacements they needed, the owners of the line would go bankrupt, and there was no other line left in operation on Lake Michigan. . . . "That nook?" said Lillian, pointing to an arrangement of settees and coffee tables in their drawing room. "Why, no, Henry, it's not new, but I suppose I should feel flattered that three weeks is all it took you to notice it. It's my own adaptation of the morning room of a famous French palace—but things like that can't possibly interest you, darling, there's no stock market quotation on them, none whatever." . . . The order for copper, which he had placed six months ago, had not been delivered, the promised date had been postponed three times—"We can't help it, Mr. Rearden"—he had to find another company to deal with, the supply of copper was becoming increasingly uncertain. . . . Philip did not smile, when he looked up in the midst of a speech he was making to some friend of their mother's, about some organization he had joined, but there was something that suggested a smile of superiority in the loose muscles of his face when he said, "No, you wouldn't care for this, it's not business, Henry, not business at all, it's a strictly non-commercial endeavor." . . . That contractor in Detroit, with the job of rebuilding a large factory, was considering structural shapes of Rearden Metal—