we know the real trick." We were not after power—he said to the gigolo's ancestors-in-spirit—and we did not live by means of that which we condemned. We regarded productive ability as virtue—and we let the degree of his virtue be the measure of a man's reward. We drew no advantage from the things we regarded as evil—we did not require the existence of bank robbers in order to operate our banks, or of burglars in order to provide for our homes, or of murderers in order to protect our lives. But you need the products of a man's ability—yet you proclaim that productive ability is a selfish evil and you turn the degree of a man's productiveness into the measure of his loss. We lived by that which we held to be good and punished that which we held to be evil. You live by that which you denounce as evil and punish that which you know to be good.

He remembered the formula of the punishment that Lillian had sought to impose on him, the formula he had considered too monstrous to believe—and he saw it now in its full application, as a system of thought, as a way of life and on a world scale. There it was: the punishment that required the victim's own virtue as the fuel to make it work—his invention of Rearden Metal being used as the cause of his expropriation—Dagny's honor and the depth of their feeling for each other being used as a tool of blackmail, a blackmail from which the depraved would be immune—and, in the People's States of Europe, millions of men being held in bondage by means of their desire to live, by means of their energy drained in forced labor, by means of their ability to feed their masters, by means of the hostage system, of their love for their children or wives or friends—by means of love, ability and pleasure as the fodder for threats and the bait for extortion, with love tied to fear, ability to punishment, ambition to confiscation, with blackmail as law, with escape from pain, not quest for pleasure, as the only incentive to effort and the only reward of achievement—men held enslaved by means of whatever living power they possessed and of whatever joy they found in life. Such was the code that the world had accepted and such was the key to the code: that it hooked man's love of existence to a circuit of torture, so that only the man who had nothing to offer would have nothing to fear, so that the virtues which made life possible and the values which gave it meaning became the agents of its destruction, so that one's best became the tool of one's agony, and man's life on earth became impractical.

"Yours was the code of life," said the voice of a man whom he could not forget. "What, then, is theirs?"

Why had the world accepted it?—he thought. How had the victims come to sanction a code that pronounced them guilty of the fact of existing? . . . And then the violence of an inner blow became the total stillness of his body as he sat looking at a sudden vision: Hadn't he done it also? Hadn't he given his sanction to the code of self-damnation? Dagny—he thought—and the depth of their feeling for each other . . . the blackmail from which the depraved would be immune . . . hadn't he, too, once called it depravity? Hadn't he been first to throw at her all the insults which the human scum was now

threatening to throw at her in public? Hadn't he accepted as guilt the highest happiness he had ever found?

"You who won't allow one per cent of impurity into an alloy of metal," the unforgotten voice was saying to him, "what have you allowed into your moral code?"

"Well, Mr. Rearden?" said the voice of Dr. Ferris. "Do you understand me now? Do we get the Metal or do we make a public showplace out of Miss Taggart's bedroom?"

He was not seeing Dr. Ferris. He was seeing—in the violent clarity that was like a spotlight tearing every riddle open to him—the day he met Dagny for the first time.

It was a few months after she had become Vice-President of Taggart Transcontinental. He had been hearing skeptically, for some time, the rumors that the railroad was run by Jim Taggart's sister. That summer, when he grew exasperated at Taggart's delays and contradictions over an order of rail for a new cutoff, an order which Taggart kept placing, altering and withdrawing, somebody told him that if he wished to get any sense or action out of Taggart Transcontinental, he'd better speak to Jim's sister. He telephoned her office to make an appointment and insisted on having it that same afternoon. Her secretary told him that Miss Taggart would be at the construction site of the new cutoff, that afternoon, at Milford Station between New York and Philadelphia, but would be glad to see him there if he wished. He went to the appointment resentfully; he did not like such businesswomen as he had met, and he felt that railroads were no business for a woman to play with; he expected a spoiled heiress who used her name and sex as substitute for ability, some eyebrow-plucked, overgroomed female, like the lady executives of department stores.

He got off the last car of a long train, far beyond the platform of Milford Station: There was a clutter of sidings, freight cars, cranes and steam shovels around him, descending from the main track down the slope of a ravine where men were grading the roadbed of the new cutoff. He started walking between the sidings toward the station building. Then he stopped.

He saw a girl standing on top of a pile of machinery on a flatcar. She was looking off at the ravine, her head lifted, strands of disordered hair stirring in the wind. Her plain gray suit was like a thin coating of metal over a slender body against the spread of sunflooded space and sky. Her posture had the lightness and unself-conscious precision of an arrogantly pure self-confidence. She was watching the work, her glance intent and purposeful, the glance of competence enjoying its own function. She looked as if this were her place, her moment and her world, she looked as if enjoyment were her natural state, her face was the living form of an active, living intelligence, a young girl's face with a woman's mouth, she seemed unaware of her body except as of a taut instrument ready to serve her purpose in any manner she wished.

Had he asked himself a moment earlier whether he carried in his mind an image of what he wanted a woman to look like, he would have answered that he did not; yet, seeing her, he knew that this