"Leave that up to me."

"Whatever they do to you, I want it done to me also."

"Leave it up to me. Dearest, don't you understand? I think that what I want most right now is what you want: not to see any of them. But I have to stay here for a while. So it will help me if I know that you, at least, are out of their reach. I want to keep one clean point in my mind, to lean against. It will be only a short while—and then I'll come for you. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my darling. So long."

It was weightlessly easy to walk out of her office and down the stretching halls of Taggart Transcontinental. She walked, looking ahead, her steps advancing with the unbroken, unhurried rhythm of finality. Her face was held level and it had a look of astonishment, of acceptance, of repose.

She walked across the concourse of the Terminal. She saw the statue of Nathaniel Taggart. But she felt no pain from it and no reproach, only the rising fullness of her love, only the feeling that she was going to join him, not in death, but in that which had been his life.

* *

The first man to quit at Rearden Steel was Tom Colby, rolling mill foreman, head of the Rearden Steel Workers Union. For ten years, he had heard himself denounced throughout the country, because his was a "company union" and because he had never engaged in a violent conflict with the management. This was true: no conflict had ever been necessary; Rearden paid a higher wage scale than any union scale in the country, for which he demanded—and got—the best labor force to be found anywhere.

When Tom Colby told him that he was quitting, Rearden nodded, without comment or questions.

"I won't work under these conditions, myself," Colby added quietly, "and I won't help to keep the men working. They trust me. I won't be the Judas goat leading them to the stockyards."

"What are you going to do for a living?" asked Rearden.

"I've saved enough to last me for about a year."

"And after that?"

Colby shrugged.

Rearden thought of the boy with the angry eyes, who mined coal at night as a criminal. He thought of all the dark roads, the alleys, the back yards of the country, where the best of the country's men would now exchange their services in jungle barter, in chance jobs, in unrecorded transactions. He thought of the end of that road.

Tom Colby seemed to know what he was thinking. "You're on your way to end up right alongside of me, Mr. Rearden," he said. "Are you going to sign your brains over to them?"

"No."

"And after that?"

Rearden shrugged.

Colby's eyes watched him for a moment, pale, shrewd eyes in a furnace-tanned face with soot-engraved wrinkles. "They've been tell-

ing us for years that it's you against me, Mr. Rearden. But it isn't. It's Orren Boyle and Fred Kinnan against you and me."

"I know it."

The Wet Nurse had never entered Rearden's office, as if sensing that that was a place he had no right to enter. He always waited to catch a glimpse of Rearden outside. The directive had attached him to his job, as the mills' official watchdog of over-or-underproduction. He stopped Rearden, a few days later, in an alley between the rows of open-hearth furnaces. There was an odd look of fierceness on the boy's face.

"Mr. Rearden," he said, "I wanted to tell you that if you want to pour ten times the quota of Rearden Metal or steel or pig iron or anything, and bootleg it all over the place to anybody at any price—I wanted to tell you to go ahead. I'll fix it up. I'll juggle the books. I'll fake the reports. I'll get phony witnesses. I'll forge affidavits. I'll commit perjury—so you don't have to worry, there won't be any trouble!"

"Now why do you want to do that?" asked Rearden, smiling, but his smile vanished when he heard the boy answer earnestly:

"Because I want, for once, to do something moral."

"That's not the way to be moral—" Rearden started, and stopped abruptly, realizing that it *was* the way, the only way left, realizing through how many twists of intellectual corruption upon corruption this boy had to struggle toward his momentous discovery.

"I guess that's not the word," the boy said sheepishly. "I know it's a stuffy, old-fashioned word: That's not what I meant. I meant—" It was a sudden, desperate cry of incredulous anger: "Mr. Rearden, they have no right to do it!"

"What?"

"Take Rearden Metal away from you."

Rearden smiled and, prompted by a desperate pity, said, "Forget it, Non-Absolute. There are no rights."

"I know there aren't. But I mean . . what I mean is that they can't do it."

"Why not?" He could not help smiling.

"Mr. Rearden, don't sign the Gift Certificate! Don't sign it, on principle."

"I won't sign it. But there aren't any principles."

"I know there aren't." He was reciting it in full earnestness, with the honesty of a conscientious student: "I know that everything is relative and that nobody can know anything and that reason is an illusion and that there isn't any reality. But I'm just talking about Rearden Metal. Don't sign, Mr. Rearden. Morals or no morals, principles or no principles, just don't sign it—because it isn't right!"

No one else mentioned the directive in Rearden's presence. Silence was the new aspect about the mills. The men did not speak to him when he appeared in the workshops, and he noticed that they did not speak to one another. The personnel office received no formal resignations. But every other morning, one or two men failed to appear and never appeared again. Inquiries at their homes found the homes abandoned and the men gone. The personnel office did