of waiting on him. She smiled in answer to his chuckle, then sat down on the arm of a chair across the room.

"Why did you accept their invitation, Hank?" she asked. "You've always refused to join them."

"I didn't want to refuse a peace offer—when I've beaten them and they know it. I'll never join them, but an invitation to appear as a guest of honor—well, I thought they were good losers. I thought it was generous of them."

"Of *them*?"

"Are you going to say: of *me*?"

"Hank! After all the things they've done to stop you—"

"I won, didn't I? So I thought . . . You know, I didn't hold it against them that they couldn't see the value of the Metal sooner—so long as they saw it at last. Every man learns in his own way and time. Sure, I knew there was a lot of cowardice there, and envy and hypocrisy, but I thought that that was only the surface—*now*, when I've proved my case, when I've proved it so loudly!—I thought their real motive for inviting me was their appreciation of the Metal, and—"

She smiled in the brief space of his pause; she knew the sentence he had stopped himself from uttering: "—and for that, I would forgive anyone anything."

"But it wasn't," he said. "And I couldn't figure out what their motive was. Dagny, I don't think they had any motive at all. They didn't give that banquet to please me, or to gain something from me, or to save face with the public. There was no purpose of any kind about it, no meaning. They didn't really care when they denounced the Metal—and they don't care now. They're not really afraid that I'll drive them all off the market—they don't care enough even about that. Do you know what that banquet was like? It's as if they'd heard that there are values one is supposed to honor and this is what one does to honor them—so they went through the motions, like ghosts pulled by some sort of distant echoes from a better age. I . . . I couldn't stand it."

She said, her face tight, "And you don't think you're generous!"

He glanced up at her; his eyes brightened to a look of amusement. "Why do they make you so angry?"

She said, her voice low to hide the sound of tenderness, "You wanted to enjoy it . . ."

"It probably serves me right. I shouldn't have expected anything. I don't know what it was that I wanted."

"I do."

"I've never liked occasions of that sort. I don't see why I expected it to be different, this time. . . . You know, I went there feeling almost as if the Metal had changed everything, even people."

"Oh yes, Hank, I know!"

"Well, it was the wrong place to seek anything. . . . Do you remember? You said once that celebrations should be only for those who have something to celebrate."

The dot of her lighted cigarette stopped in mid-air; she sat still

She had never spoken to him of that party or of anything related to his home. In a moment, she answered quietly, "I remember."

"I know what you meant . . . I knew it then, too."

He was looking straight at her. She lowered her eyes.

He remained silent; when he spoke again, his voice was gay. "The worst thing about people is not the insults they hand out, but the compliments. I couldn't bear the kind they spouted tonight, particularly when they kept saying how much everybody needs me—they, the city, the country and the whole world, I guess. Apparently, their idea of the height of glory is to deal with people who need them. I can't stand people who need me." He glanced at her. "Do you need me?"

She answered, her voice earnest, "Desperately."

He laughed. "No. Not the way I meant. You didn't say it the way they do."

"How did I say it?"

"Like a trader—who pays for what he wants. They say it like beggars who use a tin cup as a claim check."

"I . . . pay for it, Hank?"

"Don't look innocent. You know exactly what I mean."

"Yes," she whispered; she was smiling.

"Oh, to hell with them!" he said happily, stretching his legs, shifting the position of his body on the couch, stressing the luxury of relaxation. "I'm no good as a public figure. Anyway, it doesn't matter now. We don't have to care what they see or don't see. They'll leave us alone. It's clear track ahead. What's the next undertaking, Mr. Vice-President?"

"A transcontinental track of Rearden Metal."

"How soon do you want it?"

"Tomorrow morning. Three years from now is when I'll get it."

"Think you can do it in three years?"

"If the John Galt . . . if the Rio Norte Line does as well as it's doing now."

"It's going to do better. That's only the beginning."

"I have an installment plan made out. As the money comes in, I'm going to start tearing up the main track, one division at a time, and replacing it with Rearden Metal rail."

"Okay. Any time you wish to start."

"I'll keep moving the old rail to the branch lines—they won't last much longer, if I don't. In three years, you'll ride on your own Metal into San Francisco, if somebody wants to give you a banquet there."

"In three years, I'll have mills pouring Rearden Metal in Colorado, in Michigan and in Idaho. That's *my* installment plan."

"Your own mills? Branches?"

"Uh-huh."

"What about the Equalization of Opportunity Bill?"

"You don't think it's going to exist three years from now, do you? We've given them such a demonstration that all that rot is going to be swept away. The whole country is with us. Who'll want to stop things now? Who'll listen to the bilge? There's a lobby of the better

kind of men working in Washington right this moment. They're going to get the Equalization Bill scrapped at the next session."

"I . . . I hope so."

"I've had a terrible time, these last few weeks, getting the new furnaces started, but it's all set now, they're being built, I can sit back and take it easy. I can sit at my desk, rake in the money, loaf like a bum, watch the orders for the Metal pouring in and play favorites all over the place. . . . Say, what's the first train you've got for Philadelphia tomorrow morning?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You don't? What's the use of an Operating Vice-President? I have to be at the mills by seven tomorrow Got anything running around six?"

"Five-thirty A.M. is the first one, I think."

"Will you wake me up in time to make it or would you rather order the train held for me?"

"I'll wake you up."

She sat, watching him as he remained silent. He had looked tired when he came in; the lines of exhaustion were gone from his face now.

"Dagny," he asked suddenly, his tone had changed, there was some hidden, earnest note in his voice, "why didn't you want to see me in public?"

"I don't want to be part of your . . . official life."

He did not answer; in a moment, he asked casually, "When did you take a vacation last?"

"I think it was two . . . no, three years ago."

"What did you do?"

"Went to the Adirondacks for a month Came back in a week."

"I did that five years ago. Only it was Oregon." He lay flat on his back, looking at the ceiling. "Dagny, let's take a vacation together. Let's take my car and drive away for a few weeks, anywhere, just drive, down the back roads, where no one knows us. We'll leave no address, we won't look at a newspaper, we won't touch a phone--we won't have any official life at all."

She got up. She approached him, she stood by the side of the couch, looking down at him, the light of the lamp behind her; she did not want him to see her face and the effort she was making not to smile.

"You can take a few weeks off, can't you?" he said. "Things are set and going now. It's safe. We won't have another chance in the next three years."

"All right, Hank," she said, forcing her voice to sound calmly toneless.

"Will you?"

"When do you want to start?"

"Monday morning."

"All right."

She turned to step away. He seized her wrist, pulled her down, swung her body to lie stretched full-length on top of him, he held her still, uncomfortably, as she had fallen, his one hand in her hair,