

pling the sum and releasing the intricate lock, the answer uniting all the pieces, the questions and the unsolved wounds of his life.

In the moment of silence after the crash, it seemed to him that he heard Francisco's voice, asking him quietly in the ballroom of this building, yet asking it also here and now: "Who is the guiltiest man in this room?" He heard his own answer of the past: "I suppose—James Taggart?" and Francisco's voice saying without reproach: "No, Mr. Rearden, it's not James Taggart."—but here, in this room and this moment, his mind answered: "I am."

He had cursed these looters for their stubborn blindness? It was he who had made it possible. From the first extortion he had accepted, from the first directive he had obeyed, he had given them cause to believe that reality was a thing to be cheated, that one could demand the irrational and someone somehow would provide it. If he had accepted the Equalization of Opportunity Bill, if he had accepted Directive 10-289, if he had accepted the law that those who could not equal his ability had the right to dispose of it, that those who had not earned were to profit, but he who had was to lose, that those who could not think were to command, but he who could was to obey them--then were they illogical in believing that they existed in an irrational universe? He had made it for them. he had provided it. Were they illogical in believing that theirs was only *to wish*, to wish with no concern for the possible--and that *his* was to fulfill their wishes, by means they did not have to know or name? They, the impotent mystics, struggling to escape the responsibility of reason, had known that he, the rationalist, had undertaken to serve their whims. They had known that he had given them a blank check on reality--his was not to ask *why?*--theirs was not to ask *how?*--let them demand that he give them a share of his wealth, then all that he owns, then more than he owns--impossible?--no, *he'll do something!*

He did not know that he had leaped to his feet, that he stood staring down at James Taggart, seeing in the unbridled shapelessness of Taggart's features the answer to all the devastation he had witnessed through the years of his life.

"What's the matter, Mr. Rearden? What have I said?" Taggart was asking with rising anxiety—but he was out of the reach of Taggart's voice.

He was seeing the progression of the years, the monstrous extortions, the impossible demands, the inexplicable victories of evil, the preposterous plans and unintelligible goals proclaimed in volumes of muddy philosophy, the desperate wonder of the victims who thought that some complex, malevolent wisdom was moving the powers destroying the world—and all of it had rested on one tenet behind the shifty eyes of the victors: *he'll do something!* . . . We'll get away with it—he'll let us—*he'll do something!* . . .

You businessmen kept predicting that we'd perish, but we haven't. . . . It was true, he thought. They had not been blind to reality, *he* had—blind to the reality he himself had created. No, they had not perished, but who had? Who had perished to pay for their

manner of survival? Ellis Wyatt . . . Ken Danagger . . . Francisco d'Anconia.

He was reaching for his hat and coat, when he noticed that the men in the room were trying to stop him, that their faces had a look of panic and their voices were crying in bewilderment: "What's the matter, Mr. Rearden? . . . Why? . . . But why? . . . What have we said? . . . You're not going! . . . You can't go! . . . It's too early! . . . Not yet! Oh, not yet!"

He felt as if he were seeing them from the rear window of a speeding express, as if they stood on the track behind him, waving their arms in futile gestures and screaming indistinguishable sounds, their figures growing smaller in the distance, their voices fading.

One of them tried to stop him as he turned to the door. He pushed him out of his way, not roughly, but with a simple, smooth sweep of his arm, as one brushes aside an obstructing curtain then walked out.

Silence was his only sensation, as he sat at the wheel of his car, speeding back down the road to Philadelphia. It was the silence of immobility within him, as if possessing knowledge, he could now afford to rest with no further activity of soul. He felt nothing, neither anguish nor elation. It was as if, by an effort of years, he had climbed a mountain to gain a distant view and, having reached the top, had fallen to lie still, to rest before he looked, free to spare himself for the first time.

He was aware of the long, empty road streaming, then curving, then streaming straight before him, of the effortless pressure of his hands on the wheel and the screech of the tires on the curves. But he felt as if he were speeding down a skyway suspended and coiling in empty space.

The passers-by at the factories, the bridges, the power plants along his road saw a sight that had once been natural among them: a trim, expensively powerful car driven by a confident man, with the concept of success proclaimed more loudly than by any electric sign, proclaimed by the driver's garments, by his expert steering, by his purposeful speed. They watched him go past and vanish into the haze equating earth with night.

He saw his mills rising in the darkness, as a black silhouette against a breathing glow. The glow was the color of burning gold, and "Rearden Steel" stood written across the sky in the cool, white fire of crystal.

He looked at the long silhouette, the curves of blast furnaces standing like triumphal arches, the smokestacks rising like a solemn colonnade along an avenue of honor in an imperial city, the bridges hanging like garlands, the cranes saluting like lances, the smoke waving slowly like flags. The sight broke the stillness within him and he smiled in greeting. It was a smile of happiness, of love, of dedication. He had never loved his mills as he did in that moment, for—seeing them by an act of his own vision, cleared of all but his own code of values, in a luminous reality that held no contradictions—he was seeing the reason of his love: the mills were an achievement of his mind, devoted to his enjoyment of existence, erected in a rational world to deal with rational men. If those men had vanished, if that