"Don't waste your time on them," said Rearden. "You'll never get anything from that outfit."

"You know, Mr. Rearden," he said in the tone of a discovery which he could not quite bring himself to believe, "I think there's something phony about the way Mr. Boyle runs his business. I can't understand what he's after. They've got half their furnaces idle, but last month there were all those big stories about Associated Steel in all the newspapers About their output? Why, no—about the wonderful housing project that Mr. Boyle's just built for his workers. Last week, it was colored movies that Mr. Boyle sent to all the high schools, showing how steel is made and what great service it performs for everybody. Now Mr. Boyle's got a radio program, they give talks about the importance of the steel industry to the country and they keep saying that we must preserve the steel industry as a whole. I don't understand what he means by 'as a whole.' "

"I do. Forget it. He won't get away with it."

"You know, Mr. Rearden, I don't like people who talk too much about how everything they do is just for the sake of others It's not true, and I don't think it would be right if it were true. So I'll say that what I need the steel for is to save my own business. Because it's mine. Because if I had to close it . . . oh well, nobody understands that nowadays."

"I do"

"Yes . Yes, I think you would . . . So, you see, that's my first concern. But still, there are my customers, too. They've dealt with me for years They're counting on me. It's just about impossible to get any sort of machinery anywhere. Do you know what it's getting to be like, out in Minnesota, when the farmers can't get tools, when machines break down in the middle of the harvest season and there are no parts, no replacements . . . nothing but Mr. Orren Boyle's colored movies about . . . Oh well . . . And then there are my workers, too. Some of them have been with us since my father's time They've got no other place to go. Not now."

It was impossible, thought Rearden, to squeeze more steel out of mills where every furnace, every hour and every ton were scheduled in advance for urgent orders for the next six months. But . . . The John Galt Line, he thought. If he could do that, he could do anything. . . . He felt as if he wished to undertake ten new problems at once. He felt as if this were a world where nothing was impossible to him.

"Look," he said, reaching for the telephone, "let me check with my superintendent and see just what we're pouring in the next few weeks. Maybe I'll find a way to borrow a few tons from some of the orders and-- "

Mr. Ward looked quickly away from him, but Rearden had caught a glimpse of his face. It's so much for him, thought Rearden, and so little for me!

He lifted the telephone receiver, but he had to drop it, because the door of his office flew open and Gwen Ives rushed in.

It seemed impossible that Miss Ives should permit herself a breach of that kind, or that the calm of her face should look like an unnatu-

ral distortion, or that her eyes should seem blinded, or that her steps should sound a shred of discipline away from staggering. She said, "Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Rearden," but he knew that she did not see the office, did not see Mr. Ward, saw nothing but him. "I thought I must tell you that the Legislature has just passed the Equalization of Opportunity Bill."

It was the stolid Mr. Ward who screamed, "Oh God, no! Oh, no!"—staring at Rearden.

Rearden had leaped to his feet. He stood unnaturally bent, one shoulder drooping forward. It was only an instant. Then he looked around him, as if regaining eyesight, said, "Excuse me," his glance including both Miss Ives and Mr. Ward, and sat down again.

"We were not informed that the Bill had been brought to the floor, were we?" he asked, his voice controlled and dry.

"No, Mr. Rearden. Apparently, it was a surprise move and it took them just forty-five minutes."

"Have you heard from Mouch?"

"No, Mr. Rearden." She stressed the no. "It was the office boy from the fifth floor who came running in to tell me that he'd just heard it on the radio. I called the newspapers to verify it. I tried to reach Mr. Mouch in Washington. His office does not answer."

"When did we hear from him last?"

"Ten days ago, Mr. Rearden."

"All right. Thank you, Gwen. Keep trying to get his office."

"Yes, Mr. Rearden."

She walked out. Mr. Ward was on his feet, hat in hand. He muttered, "I guess I'd better—"

"Sit down!" Rearden snapped fiercely.

Mr. Ward obeyed, staring at him.

"We had business to transact; didn't we?" said Rearden. Mr. Ward could not define the emotion that contorted Rearden's mouth as he spoke. "Mr. Ward, what is it that the foulest bastards on earth denounce us for, among other things? Oh yes, for our motto of 'Business as usual.' Well—business as usual, Mr. Ward!"

He picked up the telephone receiver and asked for his superintendent. "Say, Pete . . . What? . . . Yes, I've heard. Can it. We'll talk about that later. What I want to know is, could you let me have five hundred tons of steel, extra, above schedule, in the next few weeks? . . . Yes, I know . . . I know it's tough . . . Give me the dates and the figures." He listened, rapidly jotting notes down on a sheet of paper. Then he said, "Right. Thank you," and hung up.

He studied the figures for a few moments, making some brief calculations on the margin of the sheet. Then he raised his head.

"All right, Mr. Ward," he said. "You will have your steel in ten days."

When Mr. Ward had gone, Rearden came into the anteroom. He said to Miss Ives, his voice normal, "Wire Fleming in Colorado. He'll know why I have to cancel that option." She inclined her head, in the manner of a nod signifying obedience. She did not look at him.

He turned to his next caller and said, with a gesture of invitation toward his office, "How do you do. Come in."