ies suffered by employees. They printed a story describing the hardships of the workers of Rearden Steel under the present rise in the cost of their living—next to a story describing Hank Rearden's profits, of five years ago. They printed a story on the plight of a Rearden worker's wife trudging from store to store in a hopeless quest for food—next to a story about a champagne bottle broken over somebody's head at a drunken party given by an unnamed steel tycoon at a fashionable hotel: the steel tycoon had been Orren Boyle, but the story mentioned no names. "Inequalities still exist among us," the newspapers were saying, "and cheat us of the benefits of our enlightened age." "Privations have worn the nerves and temper of the people. The situation is reaching the danger point. We fear an outbreak of violence." "We fear an outbreak of violence," the newspapers kept repeating.

On October 28, a group of the new workers at Rearden Steel attacked a foreman and knocked the tuyères off a blast furnace. Two days later, a similar group broke the ground-floor windows of the administration building. A new worker smashed the gears of a crane, upsetting a ladle of molten metal within a yard of five bystanders. "Guess I went nuts, worrying about my hungry kids," he said, when arrested. "This is no time to theorize about who's right or wrong," the newspapers commented. "Our sole concern is the fact that an inflammatory situation is endangering the steel output of the country."

Rearden watched, asking no questions. He waited, as if some final knowledge were in the process of unraveling before him, a process not to be hastened or stopped. No—he thought through the early dusk of autumn evenings, looking out the window of his office—no, he was not indifferent to his mills; but the feeling which had once been passion for a living entity was now like the wistful tenderness one feels for the memory of the loved and dead. The special quality of what one feels for the dead, he thought, is that no action is possible any longer.

On the morning of October 31, he received a notice informing him that all of his property, including his bank accounts and safety deposit boxes, had been attached to satisfy a delinquent judgment obtained against him in a trial involving a deficiency in his personal income tax of three years ago. It was a formal notice, complying with every requirement of the law—except that no such deficiency had ever existed and no such trial had ever taken place.

"No," he said to his indignation-choked attorney, "don't question them, don't answer, don't object." "But this is fantastic!" "Any more fantastic than the rest?" "Hank, do you want me to do nothing? To take it lying down?" "No, standing up. And I mean, *standing*. Don't move. Don't act." "But they've left you helpless." "Have they?" he asked softly, smiling.

He had a few hundred dollars in cash left in his wallet, nothing else. But the odd, glowing warmth in his mind, like the feel of a distant handshake, was the thought that in a secret safe of his bedroom there lay a bar of solid gold, given to him by a gold-haired pirate.

Next day, on November 1, he received a telephone call from Washington, from a bureaucrat whose voice seemed to come sliding down the wire on its knees in protestations of apology. "A mistake, Mr. Rearden! It was nothing but an unfortunate mistake! That attachment was not intended for you. You know how it is nowadays, with the inefficiency of all office help and with the amount of red tape we're tangled in, some bungling fool mixed the records and processed the attachment order against you—when it wasn't your case at all, it was, in fact, the case of a soap manufacturer! Please accept our apologies, Mr. Rearden, our deepest personal apologies at the top level." The voice slid to a slight, expectant pause. "Mr. Rearden . . . ?" "I'm listening." "I can't tell you how sorry we are to have caused you any embarrassment or inconvenience. And with all those damn formalities that we have to go through—you know how it is, red tape!—it will take a few days, perhaps a week, to deprocess that order and to lift the attachment . . . Mr. Rearden?" "I heard you." "We're desperately sorry and ready to make any amends within our power. You will, of course, be entitled to claim damages for any inconvenience this might cause you, and we are prepared to pay. We won't contest it. You will, of course, file such a claim and—" "I have not said that." "Uh? No, you haven't . . . that is . . . well, what *have* you said, Mr. Rearden?" "I have said nothing."

Late on the next afternoon, another voice came pleading from Washington. This one did not seem to slide, but to bounce on the telephone wire with the gay virtuosity of a tight-rope walker. It introduced itself as Tinky Holloway and pleaded that Rearden attend a conference, "an informal little conference, just a few of us, the top-level few," to be held in New York, at the Wayne-Falkland Hotel, day after next.

"There have been so many misunderstandings in the past few weeks!" said Tinky Holloway. "Such unfortunate misunderstandings—and so unnecessary! We could straighten everything out in a jiffy, Mr. Rearden, if we had a chance to have a little talk with you. We're extremely anxious to see you."

"You can issue a subpoena for me any time you wish."

"Oh, no! no! no!" The voice sounded frightened. "No, Mr. Rearden—why think of such things? You don't understand us, we're anxious to meet you on a friendly basis, we're seeking nothing but your voluntary co-operation." Holloway paused tensely, wondering whether he had heard the faint sound of a distant chuckle; he waited, but heard nothing else. "Mr. Rearden?"

"Yes?"

"Surely, Mr. Rearden, at a time like this, a conference with us could be to your great advantage."

"A conference—about what?"

"You've encountered so many difficulties—and we're anxious to help you in any way we can."

"I have not asked for help."

"These are precarious times, Mr. Rearden, the public mood is so uncertain and inflammatory, so . . . dangerous . . . and we want to be able to protect you."