As he turned back to the table, Rearden's eyes moved over the visitors' section. His glance paused on Dagny; a pause perceptible only to her, as if he were saying: It works. She would have appeared calm except that her eyes seemed to have become too large for her face. Eddie Willers was smiling the kind of smile that is a man's substitute for breaking into tears. Mr. Mowen looked stupefied. Paul Larkin was staring at the floor. There was no expression on Bertram Scudder's face—or on Lillian's. She sat at the end of a row, her legs crossed, a mink stole slanting from her right shoulder to her left hip; she looked at Rearden, not moving.

In the complex violence of all the things he felt, he had time to recognize a touch of regret and of longing: there was a face he had hoped to see, had looked for from the start of the session, had wanted to be present more than any other face around him. But Francisco d'Anconia had not come.

"Mr. Rearden," said the eldest judge, smiling affably, reproachfully and spreading his arms, "it is regrettable that you should have misunderstood us so completely. That's the trouble—that businessmen refuse to approach us in a spirit of trust and friendship. They seem to imagine that we are their enemies. Why do you speak of human sacrifices? What made you go to such an extreme? We have no intention of seizing your property or destroying your life. We do not seek to harm your interests. We are fully aware of your distinguished achievements. Our purpose is only to balance social pressures and do justice to all. This hearing is really intended, not as a trial, but as a friendly discussion aimed at mutual understanding and cooperation."

"I do not co-operate at the point of a gun."

"Why speak of guns? This matter is not serious enough to warrant such references. We are fully aware that the guilt in this case lies chiefly with Mr. Kenneth Danagger, who instigated this infringement of the law, who exerted pressure upon you and who confessed his guilt by disappearing in order to escape trial."

"No. We did it by equal, mutual, voluntary agreement."

"Mr. Rearden," said the second judge, "you may not share some of our ideas, but when all is said and done, we're all working for the same cause. For the good of the people. We realize that you were prompted to disregard legal technicalities by the critical situation of the coal mines and the crucial importance of fuel to the public welfare."

"No. I was prompted by my own profit and my own interests. What effect it had on the coal mines and the public welfare is for you to estimate. That was not my motive."

Mr. Mowen stared dazedly about him and whispered to Paul Larkin, "Something's gone screwy here."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Larkin.

"I am sure, Mr. Rearden," said the eldest judge, "that you do not really believe—nor does the public—that we wish to treat you as a sacrificial victim. If anyone has been laboring under such a misapprehension, we are anxious to prove that it is not true."

The judges retired to consider their verdict. They did not stay out

long. They returned to an ominously silent courtroom—and announced that a fine of $5,000 was imposed on Henry Rearden, but that the sentence was suspended.

Streaks of jeering laughter ran through the applause that swept the courtroom. The applause was aimed at Rearden, the laughter—at the judges.

Rearden stood motionless, not turning to the crowd, barely hearing the applause. He stood looking at the judges. There was no triumph in his face, no elation, only the still intensity of contemplating a vision with a bitter wonder that was almost fear. He was seeing the enormity of the smallness of the enemy who was destroying the world. He felt as if, after a journey of years through a landscape of devastation, past the ruins of great factories, the wrecks of powerful engines, the bodies of invincible men, he had come upon the despoiler, expecting to find a giant—and had found a rat eager to scurry for cover at the first sound of a human step. If this is what has beaten us, he thought, the guilt is ours.

He was jolted back into the courtroom by the people pressing to surround him. He smiled in answer to their smiles, to the frantic, tragic eagerness of their faces; there was a touch of sadness in his smile.

"God bless you, Mr. Rearden!" said an old woman with a ragged shawl over her head. "Can't you save us, Mr. Rearden? They're eating us alive, and it's no use fooling anybody about how it's the rich that they're after—do you know what's happening to us?"

"Listen, Mr. Rearden," said a man who looked like a factory worker, "it's the rich who're selling us down the river. Tell those wealthy bastards, who're so anxious to give everything away, that when they give away their palaces, they're giving away the skin off our backs."

"I know it," said Rearden.

The guilt is ours, he thought. If we who were the movers, the providers, the benefactors of mankind, were willing to let the brand of evil be stamped upon us and silently to bear punishment for our virtues—what sort of "good" did we expect to triumph in the world?

He looked at the people around him. They had cheered him today; they had cheered him by the side of the track of the John Galt Line. But tomorrow they would clamor for a new directive from Wesley Mouch and a free housing project from Orren Boyle, while Boyle's girders collapsed upon their heads. They would do it, because they would be told to forget, as a sin, that which had made them cheer Hank Rearden.

Why were they ready to renounce their highest moments as a sin? Why were they willing to betray the best within them? What made them believe that this earth was a realm of evil where despair was their natural fate? He could not name the reason, but he knew that it had to be named. He felt it as a huge question mark within the courtroom, which it was now his duty to answer.

This was the real sentence imposed upon him, he thought—to discover what idea, what simple idea available to the simplest man, had made mankind accept the doctrines that led it to self-destruction.