would need enough money for a year or two . . . to establish myself in a manner suitable to my—"

"You won't get it from me."

"I wasn't asking you for it, was I? Don't imagine that I couldn't get it somewhere else, if I wanted to! Don't imagine that I couldn't leave! I'd go in a minute, if I had only myself to think about. But Mother needs me, and if I deserted her—"

"Don't explain."

"And besides, you misunderstood me, Henry. I haven't said anything to insult you. I wasn't speaking in any personal way. I was only discussing the general political picture from an abstract sociological viewpoint which—"

"Don't explain," said Rearden. He was looking at Philip's face. It was half-lowered, its eyes looking up at him. The eyes were lifeless, as if they had witnessed nothing; they held no spark of excitement, no personal sensation, neither of defiance nor of regret, neither of shame nor of suffering; they were filmy ovals that held no response to reality, no attempt to understand it, to weigh it, to reach some verdict of justice—ovals that held nothing but a dull, still mindless hatred. "Don't explain. Just keep your mouth shut."

The revulsion that made Rearden turn his face away contained a spasm of pity. There was an instant when he wanted to seize his brother's shoulders, to shake him, to cry: How could you do this to yourself? How did you come to a stage where this is all that's left of you? Why did you let the wonderful fact of your own existence go by? . . . He looked away. He knew it was useless.

He noted, in weary contempt, that the three at the table remained silent. Through all the years past, his consideration for them had brought him nothing but their maliciously righteous reproaches. Where was their righteousness now? Now was the time to stand on their code of justice—if justice had been any part of their code. Why didn't they throw at him all those accusations of cruelty and selfishness, which he had come to accept as the eternal chorus to his life? What had permitted them to do it for years? He knew that the words he heard in his mind were the key to the answer. The sanction of the victim.

"Don't let's quarrel," said his mother, her voice cheerless and vague. "It's Thanksgiving Day."

When he looked at Lillian, he caught a glance that made him certain she had watched him for a long time, its quality was panic.

He got up. "You will please excuse me now," he said to the table at large.

"Where are you going?" asked Lillian sharply.

He stood looking at her for a deliberate moment, as if to confirm the meaning she would read in his answer: "To New York."

She jumped to her feet. "Tonight?"

"Now."

"You can't go to New York tonight!" Her voice was not loud, but it had the imperious helplessness of a shriek. "This is not the time when you can afford it. When you can afford to desert your family, I mean. You ought to think about the matter of clean hands. You're

not in a position to permit yourself anything which you know to be depravity."

By what code?—thought Rearden—by what standard?

"Why do you wish to go to New York tonight?"

"I think, Lillian, for the same reason that makes you wish to stop me."

"Tomorrow is your trial."

"That is what I mean."

He made a movement to turn, and she raised her voice: "I don't want you to go!" He smiled. It was the first time he had smiled at her in the past three months; it was not the kind of smile she could care to see. "I forbid you to leave us tonight!"

He turned and left the room.

Sitting at the wheel of his car, with the glassy, frozen road flying at his face and down under the wheels at sixty miles an hour, he let the thought of his family drop away from him—and the vision of their faces went rolling back into the abyss of speed that swallowed the bare trees and lonely structures of the roadside. There was little traffic, and few lights in the distant clusters of the towns he passed; the emptiness of inactivity was the only sign of a holiday. A hazy glow, rusted by frost, flashed above the roof of a factory once in a rare while, and a cold wind shrieked through the joints of his car, beating the canvas top against the metal frame.

By some dim sense of contrast, which he did not define, the thought of his family was replaced by the thought of his encounter with the Wet Nurse, the Washington boy of his mills.

At the time of his indictment, he had discovered that the boy had known about his deal with Danagger, yet had not reported it to anyone. "Why didn't you inform your friends about me?" he had asked.

The boy had answered brusquely, not looking at him, "Didn't want to."

"It was part of your job to watch precisely for things of that kind, wasn't it?"

"Yeah."

"Besides, your friends would have been delighted to hear it."

"I know."

"Didn't you know what a valuable piece of information it was and what a stupendous trade you could have pulled with those friends of yours in Washington whom you offered to me once—remember?—the friends who always 'occasion expenses'?" The boy had not answered. "It could have made your career at the very top level. Don't tell me that you didn't know it."

"I knew it."

"Then why didn't you make use of it?"

"I didn't want to."

"Why not?"

"Don't know."

The boy had stood, glumly avoiding Rearden's eyes, as if trying to avoid something incomprehensible within himself. Rearden had laughed. "Listen, Non-Absolute, you're playing with fire. Better go and murder somebody fast, before you let it get you—that reason

that stopped you from turning informer—or else it will blast your career to hell."

The boy had not answered.

This morning, Rearden had gone to his office as usual, even though the rest of the office building was closed. At lunch time, he had stopped at the rolling mills and had been astonished to find the Wet Nurse standing there, alone in a corner, ignored by everybody, watching the work with an air of childish enjoyment.

"What are you doing here today?" Rearden had asked. "Don't you know it's a holiday?"

"Oh, I let the girls off, but I just came in to finish some business."

"What business?"

"Oh, letters and . . Oh, hell, I signed three letters and sharpened my pencils, I know I didn't have to do it today, but I had nothing to do at home and . . I get lonesome away from this place."

"Don't you have any family?"

"No . . .not to speak of. What about you, Mr. Rearden? Don't you have any?"

"I guess—not to speak of."

"I like this place I like to hang around . . . You know Mr. Rearden, what I studied to be was a metallurgist."

Walking away, Rearden had turned to glance back and had caught the Wet Nurse looking after him as a boy would look at the hero of his childhood's favorite adventure story God help the poor little bastard!—he had thought.

God help them all—he thought, driving through the dark streets of a small town, borrowing, in contemptuous pity, the words of their belief which he had never shared He saw newspapers displayed on metal stands, with the black letters of headlines screaming to empty corners: "Railroad Disaster." He had heard the news on the radio, that afternoon: there had been a wreck on the main line of Taggart Transcontinental, near Rockland, Wyoming: a split rail had sent a freight train crashing over the edge of a canyon. Wrecks on the Taggart main line were becoming more frequent—the track was wearing out—the track which, less than eighteen months ago, Dagny was planning to rebuild, promising him a journey from coast to coast on his own Metal.

She had spent a year, picking worn rail from abandoned branches to patch the rail of the main line She had spent months fighting the men of Jim's Board of Directors, who said that the national emergency was only temporary and a track that had lasted for ten years could well last for another winter, until spring, when conditions would improve, as Mr. Wesley Mouch had promised. Three weeks ago, she had made them authorize the purchase of sixty thousand tons of new rail; it could do no more than make a few patches across the continent in the worst divisions, but it was all she had been able to obtain from them. She had had to wrench the money out of men deaf with panic: the freight revenues were falling at such a rate that the men of the Board had begun to tremble, staring at Jim's idea of the most prosperous year in Taggart history. She had had to order