further effort. I believed that love is a gratuity, not a reward to be earned just as they believe it is their right to demand an unearned wealth. And just as they believe that their need is a claim on my energy, so I believed that her unhappiness was a claim on my life. For the sake of pity, not justice, I endured ten years of self-torture. I placed pity above my own conscience, and *this* is the core of my guilt. My crime was committed when I said to her, "By every standard of mine, to maintain our marriage will be a vicious fraud. But my standards are not yours. I do not understand yours, I never have, but I will accept them."

Here they are, lying on my desk, those standards I accepted without understanding, here is the manner of her love for me, that love which I never believed, but tried to spare. Here is the final product of the unearned. I thought that it was proper to commit injustice, so long as I would be the only one to suffer. But nothing can justify injustice. And this is the punishment for accepting as proper that hideous evil which is self-immolation. I thought that I would be the only victim. Instead, I've sacrificed the noblest woman to the vilest. When one acts on pity against justice, it is the good whom one punishes for the sake of the evil; when one saves the guilty from suffering, it is the innocent whom one forces to suffer. There is no escape from justice, nothing can be unearned and unpaid for in the universe, neither in matter nor in spirit—and if the guilty do not pay, then the innocent have to pay it.

It was not the cheap little looters of wealth who have beaten me—it was I. They did not disarm me—I threw away my weapon. This is a battle that cannot be fought except with clean hands—because the enemy's sole power is in the sores of one's conscience—and I accepted a code that made me regard the strength of my hands as a sin and a stain.

"Do we get the Metal, Mr. Rearden?"

He looked from the Gift Certificate on his desk to the memory of the girl on the flatcar. He asked himself whether he could deliver the radiant being he had seen in that moment, to the looters of the mind and the thugs of the press. Could he continue to let the innocent bear punishment? Could he let her take the stand *he* should have taken? Could he now defy the enemy's code, when the disgrace would be hers, not his—when the muck would be thrown at her, not at him—when she would have to fight, while he'd be spared? Could he let her existence be turned into a hell he would have no way of sharing?

He sat still, looking up at her. I love you, he said to the girl on the flatcar, silently pronouncing the words that had been the meaning of that moment four years ago, feeling the solemn happiness that belonged with the words, even though this was how he had to say it to her for the first time.

He looked down at the Gift Certificate. Dagny, he thought, you would not let me do it if you knew, you will hate me for it if you learn—but I cannot let you pay my debts. The fault was mine and I will not shift to you the punishment which is mine to take. Even if I have nothing else now left to me, I have this much: that I see

the truth, that I am free of their guilt, that I can now stand guiltless in my own eyes, that I know I am right, right fully and for the first time—and that I will remain faithful to the one commandment of my code which I have never broken: to be a man who pays his own way.

I love you, he said to the girl on the flatcar, feeling as if the light of that summer's sun were touching his forehead, as if he, too, were standing under an open sky over an unobstructed earth, with nothing left to him except himself.

"Well, Mr. Rearden? Are you going to sign?" asked Dr. Ferris.

Rearden's eyes moved to him. He had forgotten that Ferris was there, he did not know whether Ferris had been speaking, arguing or waiting in silence.

"Oh, that?" said Rearden.

He picked up a pen and with no second glance, with the easy gesture of a millionaire signing a check, he signed his name at the foot of the Statue of Liberty and pushed the Gift Certificate across the desk.

Chapter VII THE MORATORIUM ON BRAINS

"Where have you been all this time?" Eddie Willers asked the worker in the underground cafeteria, and added, with a smile that was an appeal, an apology and a confession of despair, "Oh, I know it's I who've stayed away from here for weeks." The smile looked like the effort of a crippled child groping for a gesture that he could not perform any longer. "I did come here once, about two weeks ago, but you weren't here that night. I was afraid you'd gone . . . so many people are vanishing without notice. I hear there's hundreds of them roving around the country. The police have been arresting them for leaving their jobs—they're called deserters—but there's too many of them and no food to feed them in jail, so—nobody gives a damn any more, one way or another. I heard the deserters are just wandering about, doing odd jobs or worse—who's got any odd jobs to offer these days? . . It's our best men that we're losing, the kind who've been with the company for twenty years or more. Why did they have to chain them to their jobs? Those men never intended to quit—but now they're quitting at the slightest disagreement, just dropping their tools and walking off, any hour of the day or night, leaving us in all sorts of jams—the men who used to leap out of bed and come running if the railroad needed them. . . . You should see the kind of human driftwood we're getting to fill the vacancies. Some of them mean well, but they're scared of their own shadows. Others are the kind of scum I didn't think existed—they get the jobs and they know that we can't throw them out once they're in, so they make it clear that they don't intend to work for their pay and never did intend. They're the kind of men who *like* it—who like the way things are now. Can you imagine that there are human beings who like it? Well, there are. . . . You know, I don't think that I really believe it—all that's happening to us these days. It's happening all