straight, still band in the west, and the breathing red band in the east was the glow of his mills.

The feel of the steering wheel under his hands and of the smooth highway streaming past, as he sped to New York, had an oddly bracing quality. It was a sense of extreme precision and of relaxation, together, a sense of action without strain, which seemed inexplicably youthful—until he realized that this was the way he had acted and had expected always to act, in his youth—and what he now felt was like the simple, astonished question: Why should one ever have to act in any other manner?

It seemed to him that the skyline of New York, when it rose before him, had a strangely luminous clarity, though its shapes were veiled by distance, a clarity that did not seem to rest in the object, but felt as if the illumination came from him. He looked at the great city, with no tie to any view or usage others had made of it, it was not a city of gangsters or panhandlers or derelicts or whores, it was the greatest industrial achievement in the history of man, its only meaning was that which it meant to him, there was a personal quality in his sight of it, a quality of possessiveness and of unhesitant perception, as if he were seeing it for the first time—or the last.

He paused in the silent corridor of the Wayne-Falkland, at the door of the suite he was to enter; it took him a long moment's effort to lift his hand and knock: it was the suite that had belonged to Francisco d'Anconia.

There were coils of cigarette smoke weaving through the air of the drawing room, among the velvet drapes and bare, polished tables. With its costly furniture and the absence of all personal belongings, the room had that air of dreary luxury which pertains to transient occupancy, as dismal as the air of a flophouse. Five figures rose in the fog at his entrance: Wesley Mouch, Eugene Lawson, James Taggart, Dr. Floyd Ferris and a slim, slouching man who looked like a rat-faced tennis player and was introduced to him as Tinky Holloway.

"All right," said Rearden, cutting off the greetings, the smiles, the offers of drinks and the comments on the national emergency, "what did you want?"

"We're here as your friends, Mr. Rearden," said Tinky Holloway, "purely as your friends, for an informal conversation with a view to closer mutual teamwork."

"We're anxious to avail ourselves of your outstanding ability," said Lawson, "and your expert advice on the country's industrial problems."

"It's men like you that we need in Washington," said Dr. Ferris. "There's no reason why you should have remained an outsider for so long, when your voice is needed at the top level of national leadership."

The sickening thing about it, thought Rearden, was that the speeches were only half-lies; the other half, in their tone of hysterical urgency, was the unstated wish to have it somehow be true. "What did you want?" he asked.

"Why . . . to listen to *you*, Mr. Rearden," said Wesley Mouch, the

jerk of his features imitating a frightened smile; the smile was faked, the fear was real. "We . . . we want the benefit of your opinion on the nation's industrial crisis."

"I have nothing to say."

"But, Mr. Rearden," said Dr. Ferris, "all we want is a chance to co-operate with you."

"I've told you once, publicly, that I don't co-operate at the point of a gun."

"Can't we bury the hatchet at a time like this?" said Lawson beseechingly.

"The gun? Go ahead."

"Uh?"

"It's you who're holding it. Bury it, if you think you can."

"That . . . that was just a figure of speech," Lawson explained, blinking. "I was speaking metaphorically."

"I wasn't."

"Can't we all stand together for the sake of the country in this hour of emergency?" said Dr. Ferris. "Can't we disregard our differences of opinion? We're willing to meet you halfway. If there's any aspect of our policy which you oppose, just tell us and we'll issue a directive to—"

"Cut it, boys. I didn't come here to help you pretend that I'm not in the position I'm in and that any halfway is possible between us. Now come to the point. You've prepared some new gimmick to spring on the steel industry. What is it?"

"As a matter of fact," said Mouch, "we do have a vital question to discuss in regard to the steel industry, but . . . but your language, Mr. Rearden!"

"We don't want to *spring* anything on you," said Holloway. "We asked you here to *discuss* it with you."

"I came here to take orders. Give them."

"But, Mr. Rearden, we don't want to look at it that way. We don't want to give you *orders*. We want your *voluntary* consent."

Rearden smiled. "I know it."

"You do?" Holloway started eagerly, but something about Rearden's smile made him slide into uncertainty. "Well, then—"

"And you, brother," said Rearden, "know that *that* is the flaw in your game, the fatal flaw that will blast it sky-high. Now do you tell me what clout on my head you're working so hard not to let me notice—or do I go home?"

"Oh no, Mr. Rearden!" cried Lawson, with a sudden dart of his eyes to his wrist watch. "You can't go now!—That is, I mean, you wouldn't want to go without hearing what we have to say."

"Then let me hear it."

He saw them glancing at one another. Wesley Mouch seemed afraid to address him; Mouch's face assumed an expression of petulant stubbornness, like a signal of command pushing the others forward; whatever their qualifications to dispose of the fate of the steel industry, they had been brought here to act as Mouch's conversational bodyguards. Rearden wondered about the reason for the pres-

ence of James Taggart; Taggart sat in gloomy silence, sullenly sipping a drink, never glancing in his direction.

"We have worked out a plan," said Dr. Ferris too cheerfully, "which will solve the problems of the steel industry and which will meet with your full approval, as a measure providing for the general welfare, while protecting your interests and insuring your safety in a—"

"Don't try to tell me what I'm going to think. Give me the facts."

"It is a plan which is fair, sound, equitable and—"

"Don't tell me your evaluation. Give me the facts."

"It is a plan which—" Dr. Ferris stopped; he had lost the habit of naming facts.

"Under this plan," said Wesley Mouch, "we will grant the industry a five per cent increase in the price of steel." He paused triumphantly.

Rearden said nothing.

"Of course, some minor adjustments will be necessary," said Holloway airily, leaping into the silence as onto a vacant tennis court. "A certain increase in prices will have to be granted to the producers of iron ore—oh, three per cent at most—in view of the added hardships which some of them, Mr. Larkin of Minnesota, for instance, will now encounter, inasmuch as they'll have to ship their ore by the costly means of trucks, since Mr. James Taggart has had to sacrifice his Minnesota branch line to the public welfare. And, of course, an increase in freight rates will have to be granted to the country's railroads—let's say, seven per cent, roughly speaking—in view of the absolutely essential need for—"

Holloway stopped, like a player emerging from a whirlwind activity to notice suddenly that no opponent was answering his shots.

"But there will be no increase in wages," said Dr. Ferris hastily. "An essential point of the plan is that we will grant no increase in wages to the steel workers, in spite of their insistent demands. We do wish to be fair to you, Mr. Rearden, and to protect your interests—even at the risk of popular resentment and indignation."

"Of course, if we expect labor to make a sacrifice," said Lawson, "we must show them that management, too, is making certain sacrifices for the sake of the country. The mood of labor in the steel industry is extremely tense at present, Mr. Rearden, it is dangerously explosive and . . . and in order to protect you from . . . from . . ." He stopped.

"Yes?" said Rearden. "From?"

"From possible . . . violence, certain measures are necessary, which . . . Look, Jim"—he turned suddenly to James Taggart—"why don't you explain it to Mr. Rearden, as a fellow industrialist?"

"Well, somebody's got to support the railroads," said Taggart sullenly, not looking at him. "The country needs railroads and somebody's got to help us carry the load, and if we don't get an increase in freight rates—"

"No, no, no!" snapped Wesley Mouch. "Tell Mr. Rearden about the working of the Railroad Unification Plan."

"Well, the Plan is a full success," said Taggart lethargically, "except for the not fully controllable element of time. It is only a ques-