you, way in advance, just like any railroad executive, automobile manufacturer or junk—I mean, scrap—dealer? They say you never miss an appointment. Of course, I'd let you pick the date to suit your convenience." She was looking up at him, her glance acquiring some special quality of feminine appeal by being sent from under her lowered forehead up toward his full height; she asked, a little too casually and too cautiously, "The date I had in mind was December tenth, but would you prefer the ninth or the eleventh?"

"It makes no difference to me."

She said gently, "December tenth is our wedding anniversary, Henry."

They were all watching his face; if they expected a look of guilt, what they saw, instead, was a faint smile of amusement. She could not have intended this as a trap, he thought, because he could escape it so easily, by refusing to accept any blame for his forgetfulness and by leaving her spurned; she knew that his feeling for her was her only weapon. Her motive, he thought, was a proudly indirect attempt to test his feeling and to confess her own. A party was not his form of celebration, but it was hers. It meant nothing in his terms; in hers, it meant the best tribute she could offer to him and to their marriage. He had to respect her intention, he thought, even if he did not share her standards, even if he did not know whether he still cared for any tribute from her. He had to let her win, he thought, because she had thrown herself upon his mercy.

He smiled, an open, unresentful smile in acknowledgment of her victory. "All right, Lillian," he said quietly, "I promise to be here on the night of December tenth."

"Thank you, dear." Her smile had a closed, mysterious quality; he wondered why he had a moment's impression that his attitude had disappointed them all.

If she trusted him, he thought, if her feeling for him was still alive, then he would match her trust. He had to say it; words were a lens to focus one's mind, and—he could not use words for anything else tonight. "I'm sorry I'm late, Lillian, but today at the mills we poured the first heat of Rearden Metal."

There was a moment of silence. Then Philip said, "Well, that's nice."

The others said nothing.

He put his hand in his pocket. When he touched it, the reality of the bracelet swept out everything else; he felt as he had felt when the liquid metal had poured through space before him.

"I brought you a present, Lillian."

He did not know that he stood straight and that the gesture of his arm was that of a returning crusader offering his trophy to his love, when he dropped a small chain of metal into her lap.

Lillian Rearden picked it up, hooked on the tips of two straight fingers, and raised it to the light. The links were heavy, crudely made, the shining metal had an odd tinge, it was greenish-blue.

"What's that?" she asked.

"The first thing made from the first heat of the first order of Rearden Metal."

"You mean," she said, "it's fully as valuable as a piece of railroad rails?"

He looked at her blankly

She jingled the bracelet, making it sparkle under the light 'Henry, it's perfectly wonderful! What originality! I shall be the sensation of New York, wearing jewelry made of the same stuff as bridge girders truck motors, kitchen stoves typewriters, and– what was it you were saying about it the other day darling?– soup kettles?"

"God Henry but you're conceited!" said Philip

Lillian laughed ' He's a sentimentalist All men are But, darling, I do appreciate it It isn't the gift, it's the intention, I know "

"The intention's plain selfishness, if you ask me," said Rearden's mother "Another man would bring a diamond bracelet, if he wanted to give his wife a present because it's *her* pleasure he'd think of, not his own But Henry thinks that just because he's made a new kind of tin why it's got to be more precious than diamonds to everybody, just because it's he that's made it That's the way he's been since he was five years old– the most conceited brat you ever saw—and I knew he'd grow up to be the most selfish creature on God's earth "

"No, it's sweet " said Lillian ' It's charming ' She dropped the bracelet down on the table She got up, put her hands on Rearden's shoulders, and raising herself on tiptoe kissed him on the cheek saying "Thank you dear '

He did not move did not bend his head down to her

After a while he turned took off his coat and sat down by the fire apart from the others He felt nothing but an immense exhaustion

He did not listen to their talk He heard dimly that Lillian was arguing defending him against his mother

'I know him better than you do his mother was saying Hank Rearden's not interested in man beast or weed unless it's tied in some way to himself and his work That's all he cares about I've tried my best to teach him some humility I've tried all my life but I've failed "

He had offered his mother unlimited means to live as and where she pleased he wondered why she had insisted that she wanted to live with him His success, he had thought, meant something to her, and if it did then it was a bond between them the only kind of bond he recognized if she wanted a place in the home of her successful son, he would not deny it to her

"It's no use hoping to make a saint out of Henry Mother ' said Philip ' He wasn't meant to be one "

' Oh but, Philip you're wrong!" said Lillian You're so wrong! Henry has all the makings of a saint That's the trouble "

What did they seek from him?—thought Rearden—what were they after? He had never asked anything of them it was they who wished to hold him they who pressed a claim on him—and the claim seemed to have the form of affection, but it was a form which he found harder to endure than any sort of hatred He despised causeless affection, just as he despised unearned wealth They professed to love him for some unknown reason and they ignored all the things