wind and a gray light squeezed from among the clouds. In that light, he saw the brown-red of rust, like dead blood, on the steel of the giant cranes—and bright, green, living weeds, like gorged cannibals, growing over piles of broken glass at the foot of walls made of empty frames. At a gate in the distance, he saw the black silhouettes of men. They were the unemployed from the rotting hovels of what had once been a prosperous town. They stood silently, looking at the glittering car he had left at the gate of the mills; they wondered whether the man on the hill was the Hank Rearden that people were talking about, and whether it was true that the mills were to be reopened. "The historical cycle of steel-making in Pennsylvania is obviously running down," a newspaper had said, "and experts agree that Henry Rearden's venture into steel is hopeless. You may soon witness the sensational end of the sensational Henry Rearden."

That was ten years ago. Tonight, the cold wind on his face felt like the wind of that day. He turned to look back. The red glow of the mills breathed in the sky, a sight as life-giving as a sunrise.

These had been his stops, the stations which an express had reached and passed. He remembered nothing distinct of the years between them; the years were blurred, like a streak of speed.

Whatever it was, he thought, whatever the strain and the agony, they were worth it, because they had made him reach this day—this day when the first heat of the first order of Rearden Metal had been poured, to become rails for Taggart Transcontinental.

He touched the bracelet in his pocket. He had had it made from that first poured metal. It was for his wife

As he touched it, he realized suddenly that he had thought of an abstraction called "his wife"—not of the woman to whom he was married He felt a stab of regret, wishing he had not made the bracelet, then a wave of self-reproach for the regret.

He shook his head. This was not the time for his old doubts. He felt that he could forgive anything to anyone, because happiness was the greatest agent of purification. He felt certain that every living being wished him well tonight. He wanted to meet someone, to face the first stranger, to stand disarmed and open, and to say, "Look at me." People, he thought, were as hungry for a sight of joy as he had always been—for a moment's relief from that gray load of suffering which seemed so inexplicable and unnecessary. He had never been able to understand why men should be unhappy.

The dark road had risen imperceptibly to the top of the hill. He stopped and turned. The red glow was a narrow strip, far to the west. Above it, small at a distance of miles, the words of a neon sign stood written on the blackness of the sky: REARDEN STEEL.

He stood straight, as if before a bench of judgment He thought that in the darkness of this night other signs were lighted over the country: Rearden Ore—Rearden Coal—Rearden Limestone. He thought of the days behind him. He wished it were possible to light a neon sign above them, saying: Rearden Life.

He turned sharply and walked on. As the road came closer to his house, he noticed that his steps were slowing down and that something was ebbing away from his mood. He felt a dim reluctance to enter his home, which he did not want to feel. No, he thought, not tonight, they'll understand it tonight. But he did not know, he had never defined, what it was that he wanted them to understand.

He saw lights in the windows of the living room, when he approached his house. The house stood on a hill, rising before him like a big white bulk; it looked naked, with a few semi-colonial pillars for reluctant ornament; it had the cheerless look of a nudity not worth revealing.

He was not certain whether his wife noticed him when he entered the living room. She sat by the fireplace, talking, the curve of her arm floating in graceful emphasis of her words. He heard a small break in her voice, and thought that she had seen him; but she did not look up and her sentence went on smoothly; he could not be certain.

"—but it's just that a man of culture is bored with the alleged wonders of purely material ingenuity," she was saying. "He simply refuses to get excited about plumbing."

Then she turned her head, looked at Rearden in the shadows across the long room, and her arms spread gracefully like two swan necks by her sides.

"Why, darling," she said in a bright tone of amusement, "isn't it too early to come home? Wasn't there some slag to sweep or tuyeres to polish?"

They all turned to him, his mother, his brother Philip and Paul Larkin, their old friend.

"I'm sorry," he answered. "I know I'm late."

"Don't say you're sorry," said his mother. "You could have telephoned." He looked at her, trying vaguely to remember something. "You promised to be here for dinner tonight."

"Oh, that's right, I did. I'm sorry. But today, at the mills, we poured—" He stopped; he did not know what made him unable to utter the one thing he had come home to say; he added only, "It's just that I ... forgot."

"That's what Mother means," said Philip.

"Oh, let him get his bearings, he's not quite here yet, he's still at the mills," his wife said gaily. "Do take your coat off, Henry."

Paul Larkin was looking at him with the devoted eyes of an inhibited dog. "Hello, Paul," said Rearden. "When did you get in?"

"Oh, I just hopped down on the five-thirty-five from New York." Larkin was smiling in gratitude for the attention.

"Trouble?"

"Who hasn't got trouble these days?" Larkin's smile became resigned, to indicate that the remark was merely philosophical. "But no, no special trouble this time. I just thought I'd drop in to see you."

His wife laughed. "You've disappointed him, Paul." She turned to Rearden. "Is it an inferiority complex or a superiority one, Henry? Do you believe that nobody can want to see you just for your own sake, or do you believe that nobody can get along without your help?"

He wanted to utter an angry denial, but she was smiling at him as if this were merely a conversational joke, and he had no capacity