and tossed down on the desk a photostat of the jeweler's bill for the ruby pendant. "You wouldn't care to see the sworn statements of apartment-house doormen and night clerks—they contain nothing that would be new to you, except the number of witnesses who know where you spent your nights in New York for about the last two years. You mustn't blame those people too much. It's an interesting characteristic of epochs such as ours that people begin to be afraid of saying the things they want to say—and afraid, when questioned, to remain silent about things they'd prefer never to utter. That is to be expected. But you would be astonished if you knew who gave us the original tip."

"I know it," said Rearden, his voice conveyed no reaction. The trip to Florida was not inexplicable to him any longer.

"There is nothing in this blackjack of mine that can harm you personally," said Dr. Ferris. "We knew that no form of personal injury would ever make you give in. Therefore, I am telling you frankly that this will not hurt you at all. It will only hurt Miss Taggart."

Rearden was looking straight at him now, but Dr. Ferris wondered why it seemed to him that the calm, closed face was moving away into a greater and greater distance.

"If this affair of yours is spread from one end of the country to the other," said Dr. Ferris, "by such experts in the art of smearing as Bertram Scudder, it will do no actual damage to your reputation. Beyond a few glances of curiosity and a few raised eyebrows in a few of the stuffier drawing rooms, you will get off quite easily. Affairs of this sort are expected of a man. In fact, it will enhance your reputation. It will give you an aura of romantic glamour among the women and, among the men, it will give you a certain kind of prestige, in the nature of envy for an unusual conquest. But what it will do to Miss Taggart—with her spotless name, her reputation for being above scandal, her peculiar position of a woman in a strictly masculine business—what it will do to her, what she will see in the eyes of everyone she meets, what she will hear from every man she deals with—I will leave that up to your own mind to imagine. And to consider."

Rearden felt nothing but a great stillness and a great clarity. It was as if some voice were telling him sternly: This is the time—the scene is lighted—now look. And standing naked in the great light: he was looking quietly, solemnly, stripped of fear, of pain, of hope, with nothing left to him but the desire to know.

Dr. Ferris was astonished to hear him say slowly, in the dispassionate tone of an abstract statement that did not seem to be addressed to his listener, "But all your calculations rest on the fact that Miss Taggart is a virtuous woman, not the slut you're going to call her."

"Yes, of course," said Dr. Ferris.

"And that this means much more to me than a casual affair."

"Of course."

"If she and I were the kind of scum you're going to make us appear, your blackjack wouldn't work."

"No, it wouldn't."

"If our relationship were the depravity you're going to proclaim it to be, you'd have no way to harm us."

"No."

"We'd be outside your power."

"Actually—yes."

It was not to Dr. Ferris that Rearden was speaking. He was seeing a long line of men stretched through the centuries from Plato onward, whose heir and final product was an incompetent little professor with the appearance of a gigolo and the soul of a thug.

"I offered you, once, a chance to join us," said Dr. Ferris. "You refused. Now you can see the consequences. How a man of your intelligence thought that he could win by playing it straight, I can't imagine."

"But if I had joined you," said Rearden, with the same detachment, as if he were not speaking about himself, "what would I have found worth looting from Orren Boyle?"

"Oh hell, there's always enough suckers to expropriate in the world!"

"Such as Miss Taggart? As Ken Danagger? As Ellis Wyatt? As I?"

"Such as any man who wants to be impractical."

"You mean that it is not practical to live on earth, is it?"

He did not know whether Dr. Ferris answered him. He was not listening any longer. He was seeing the pendulous face of Orren Boyle with the small slits of pig's eyes, the doughy face of Mr. Mowen with the eyes that scurried away from any speaker and any fact—he was seeing them go through the jerky motions of an ape performing a routine it had learned to copy by muscular habit, performing it in order to manufacture Rearden Metal, with no knowledge and no capacity to know what had taken place in the experimental laboratory of Rearden Steel through ten years of passionate devotion to an excruciating effort. It was proper that they should now call it "Miracle Metal"—a miracle was the only name *they* could give to those ten years and to that faculty from which Rearden Metal was born—a miracle was all that the Metal could be in their eyes, the product of an unknown, unknowable cause, an object in nature, not to be explained, but to be seized, like a stone or a weed, theirs for the seizing—"are we to let the many remain in want while the few withhold from us the better products and methods available?"

If I had not known that my life depends on my mind and my effort—he was saying soundlessly to the line of men stretched through the centuries—if I had not made it my highest moral purpose to exercise the best of my effort and the fullest capacity of my mind in order to support and expand my life, you would have found nothing to loot from me, nothing to support your own existence: It is not my sins that you're using to injure me, but my virtues—my virtues by your own acknowledgment, since your own life depends on them, since you need them, since you do not seek to destroy my achievement but to seize it.

He remembered the voice of the gigolo of science saying to him: "We're after power and we mean it. You fellows were pikers, but