continents. If it's a moral judgment that you wish to pronounce, Mr. Rearden, then who is the man of higher morality: I or Wesley Mouch?"

"I have no answer to give you," said Rearden, his voice low.

"Why should you be shocked, Mr. Rearden? I am merely complying with the system which my fellow men have established. If they believe that force is the proper means to deal with one another, I am giving them what they ask for. If they believe that the purpose of my life is to serve them, let them try to enforce their creed. If they believe that my mind is their property—let them come and get it."

"But what sort of life have you chosen? To what purpose are you giving your mind?"

"To the cause of my love."

"Which is what?"

"Justice."

"Served by being a pirate?"

"By working for the day when I won't have to be a pirate any longer."

"Which day is that?"

"The day when you'll be free to make a profit on Rearden Metal."

"Oh God!" said Rearden, laughing, his voice desperate. "Is that your ambition?"

Danneskjöld's face did not change. "It is."

"Do you expect to live to see that day?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"No."

"Then what are you looking forward to, Mr. Rearden?"

"Nothing."

"What are you working for?"

Rearden glanced at him. "Why do you ask that?"

"To make you understand why I'm not."

"Don't expect me ever to approve of a criminal."

"I don't expect it. But there are a few things I want to help you to see."

"Even if they're true, the things you said, why did you choose to be a bandit? Why didn't you simply step out, like—" He stopped.

"Like Ellis Wyatt, Mr. Rearden? Like Andrew Stockton? Like your friend Ken Danagger?"

"Yes!"

"Would you approve of that?"

"I—" He stopped, shocked by his own words.

The shock that came next was to see Danneskjöld smile: it was like seeing the first green of spring on the sculptured planes of an iceberg. Rearden realized suddenly, for the first time, that Danneskjold's face was more than handsome, that it had the startling beauty of physical perfection—the hard, proud features, the scornful mouth of a Viking's statue—yet he had not been aware of it, almost as if the dead sternness of the face had forbidden the impertinence of an appraisal. But the smile was brilliantly alive.

"I do approve of it, Mr. Rearden. But I've chosen a special mission

of my own. I'm after a man whom I want to destroy. He died many centuries ago, but until the last trace of him is wiped out of men's minds, we will not have a decent world to live in."

"What man?"

"Robin Hood."

Rearden looked at him blankly, not understanding.

"He was the man who robbed the rich and gave to the poor. Well, I'm the man who robs the poor and gives to the rich—or, to be exact, the man who robs the thieving poor and gives back to the productive rich."

"What in blazes do you mean?"

"If you remember the stories you've read about me in the newspapers, before they stopped printing them, you know that I have never robbed a private ship and never taken any private property. Nor have I ever robbed a military vessel—because the purpose of a military fleet is to protect from violence the citizens who paid for it, which is the proper function of a government. But I have seized every loot-carrier that came within range of my guns, every government relief ship, subsidy ship, loan ship, gift ship, every vessel with a cargo of goods taken by force from some men for the unpaid, unearned benefit of others. I seized the boats that sailed under the flag of the idea which I am fighting: the idea that need is a sacred idol requiring human sacrifices—that the need of some men is the knife of a guillotine hanging over others—that all of us must live with our work, our hopes, our plans, our efforts at the mercy of the moment when that knife will descend upon us—and that the extent of our ability is the extent of our danger, so that success will bring our heads down on the block, while failure will give us the right to pull the cord. This is the horror which Robin Hood immortalized as an ideal of righteousness. It is said that he fought against the looting rulers and returned the loot to those who had been robbed, but that is not the meaning of the legend which has survived. He is remembered, not as a champion of *property*, but as a champion of *need*, not as a defender of the *robbed*, but as a provider of the *poor*. He is held to be the first man who assumed a halo of virtue by practicing charity with wealth which he did not own, by giving away goods which he had not produced, by making others pay for the luxury of his pity. He is the man who became the symbol of the idea that need, not achievement, is the source of rights, that we don't have to produce, only to want, that the earned does not belong to us, but the unearned does. He became a justification for every mediocrity who, unable to make his own living, had demanded the power to dispose of the property of his betters, by proclaiming his willingness to devote his life to his inferiors at the price of robbing his superiors. It is this foulest of creatures—the double-parasite who lives on the sores of the poor and the blood of the rich—whom men have come to regard as a moral ideal. And this has brought us to a world where the more a man produces, the closer he comes to the loss of all his rights, until, if his ability is great enough, he becomes a rightless creature delivered as prey to any claimant—while in order to be placed above rights, above principles, above morality, placed where