

I'm hoping for. Nothing, I guess. I just go day by day, and I try not to look ahead. At first, I hoped that somebody would save us. I thought maybe it would be Hank Rearden. But he gave in. I don't know what they did to him to make him sign, but I know that it must have been something terrible. Everybody thinks so. Everybody's whispering about it, wondering what sort of pressure was used on him. . . . No, nobody knows. He's made no public statements and he's refused to see anyone. . . . But, listen, I'll tell you something else that everybody's whispering about. Lean closer, will you?—I don't want to speak too loudly. They say that Orren Boyle seems to have known about that directive long ago, weeks or months in advance, because he had started, quietly and secretly, to reconstruct his furnaces for the production of Rearden Metal, in one of his lesser steel plants, an obscure little place way out on the coast of Maine. He was ready to start pouring the Metal the moment Rearden's extortion paper—I mean, Gift Certificate—was signed. But—listen—the night before they were to start, Boyle's men were heating the furnaces in that place on the coast, when they heard a voice, they didn't know whether it came from a plane or a radio or some sort of loudspeaker, but it was a man's voice and it said that he would give them ten minutes to get out of the place. They got out. They started going and they kept on going—because the man's voice had said that he was Ragnar Danneskjöld. In the next half-hour, Boyle's mills were razed to the ground. Razed, wiped out, not a brick of them left standing. They say it was done by long-range naval guns, from somewhere way out on the Atlantic. Nobody saw Danneskjöld's ship. . . . That's what people were whispering. The newspapers haven't printed a word about it. The boys in Washington say that it's only a rumor spread by panic-mongers. . . . I don't know whether the story is true: I think it is. I *hope* it is. . . . You know, when I was fifteen years old, I used to wonder how any man could become a criminal. I couldn't understand what would make it possible. Now—now I'm glad that Ragnar Danneskjöld has blown up those mills. May God bless him and never let them find him, whatever and wherever he is! . . . Yes, that's, what I've come to feel. Well, how much do they think people can take? . . . It's not so bad for me in the daytime, because I can keep busy and not think, but it gets me at night. I can't sleep any more, I lie awake for hours. . . . Yes!—if you want to know it—yes, it's because I'm worried about her! I'm scared to death for her. Woodstock is just a miserable little hole of a place, miles away from anything, and the Taggart lodge is twenty miles farther, twenty miles of a twisting trail in a godforsaken forest. How do I know what might happen to her there, alone, and with the kind of gangs that are roving all through the country these nights just through such desolate parts of the country as the Berkshires? . . . I know I shouldn't think about it. I know that she can take care of herself. Only I wish she'd drop me a line. I wish I could go there. But she told me not to. I told her I'd wait. . . . You know, I'm glad you're here tonight. It helps me—talking to you and . . . just seeing you here. You won't vanish, like all the others, will you . . . What? Next week? . . . Oh, on your vacation. For how long? . . . How do

you rate a whole month's vacation? . . . I wish I could do that, too—take a month off at my own expense. But they wouldn't let me. . . . Really? I envy you. . . . I wouldn't have envied you a few years ago. But now—now I'd like to get away. Now I envy you—if you've been able to take a month off every summer for twelve years."

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It was a dark road, but it led in a new direction. Rearden walked from his mills, not toward his house, but toward the city of Philadelphia. It was a great distance to walk, but he had wanted to do it tonight, as he had done it every evening of the past week. He felt at peace in the empty darkness of the countryside, with nothing but the black shapes of trees around him, with no motion but that of his own body and of branches stirring in the wind, with no lights but the slow sparks of the fireflies flickering through the hedges. The two hours between mills and city were his span of rest.

He had moved out of his home to an apartment in Philadelphia. He had given no explanation to his mother and Philip, he had said nothing except that they could remain in the house if they wished and that Miss Ives would take care of their bills. He had asked them to tell Lillian, when she returned, that she was not to attempt to see him. They had stared at him in terrified silence.

He had handed to his attorney a signed blank check and said, "Get me a divorce. On any grounds and at any cost. I don't care what means you use, how many of their judges you purchase or whether you find it necessary to stage a frame-up of my wife. Do whatever you wish. But there is to be no alimony and no property settlement." The attorney had looked at him with the hint of a wise, sad smile, as if this were an event he had expected to happen long ago. He had answered, "Okay, Hank. It can be done. But it will take some time." "Make it as fast as you can."

No one had questioned him about his signature on the Gift Certificate. But he had noticed that the men at the mills looked at him with a kind of searching curiosity, almost as if they expected to find the scars of some physical torture on his body.

He felt nothing—nothing but the sense of an even, restful twilight, like a spread of slag over a molten metal, when it crusts and swallows the last brilliant spurt of the white glow within. He felt nothing at the thought of the looters who were now going to manufacture Rearden Metal. His desire to hold his right to it and proudly to be the only one to sell it, had been his form of respect for his fellow men, his belief that to trade with them was an act of honor. The belief, the respect and the desire were gone. He did not care what men made, what they sold, where they bought his Metal or whether any of them would know that it had been his. The human shapes moving past him in the streets of the city were physical objects without any meaning. The countryside—with the darkness washing away all traces of human activity, leaving only an untouched earth which he had once been able to handle—was real.

He carried a gun in his pocket, as advised by the policemen of the radio car that patrolled the roads; they had warned him that no road was safe after dark, these days. He felt, with a touch of mirthless