"Have you read the confidential reports I sent you?" moaned Mr. Thompson, that evening, facing Galt once more. He was accompanied by James Taggart, who had volunteered to meet the prisoner for the first time.

Galt sat on a straight-backed chair, his legs crossed, smoking a cigarette. He seemed erect and relaxed, together. They could not decipher the expression on his face, except that it showed no sign of apprehension.

"I have," he answered.

"There's not much time left," said Mr. Thompson.

"There isn't."

"Are you going to let such things go on?"

"Are *you*?"

"How can you be so sure you're right?" cried James Taggart; his voice was not loud, but it had the intensity of a cry. "How can you take it upon yourself, at a terrible time like this, to stick to your own ideas at the risk of destroying the whole world?"

"Whose ideas should I consider safer to follow?"

"How can you be sure you're right? How can you *know*? Nobody can be sure of his knowledge! Nobody! You're no better than anyone else!"

"Then why do you want me?"

"How can you gamble with other people's lives? How can you permit yourself such a *selfish* luxury as to hold out, when people need you?"

"You mean: when they need *my* ideas?"

"Nobody is fully right or wrong! There isn't any black or white! You don't have a monopoly on truth!"

There was something wrong in Taggart's manner—thought Mr. Thompson, frowning—some odd, too personal resentment, as if it were not a political issue that he had come here to solve.

"If you had any sense of responsibility," Taggart was saying, "you wouldn't dare take such a chance on nothing but your own judgment! You would join us and consider some ideas other than your own and admit that we might be right, too! You would help us with our plans! You would—"

Taggart went on speaking with feverish insistence, but Mr. Thompson could not tell whether Galt was listening: Galt had risen and was pacing the room, not in a manner of restlessness, but in the casual manner of a man enjoying the motion of his own body. Mr. Thompson noted the lightness of the steps, the straight spine, the flat stomach, the relaxed shoulders. Galt walked as if he were both unconscious of his body and tremendously conscious of his pride in it. Mr. Thompson glanced at James Taggart, at the sloppy posture of a tall figure slumped in ungainly self-distortion, and caught him watching Galt's movements with such hatred that Mr. Thompson sat up, fearing it would become audible in the room. But Galt was not looking at Taggart.

". . . your conscience!" Taggart was saying. "I came here to appeal to your conscience! How can you value your mind above thousands

of human lives? People are perishing and— Oh, for Christ's sake," he snapped, "stop pacing!"

Galt stopped. "Is this an order?"

"No, no!" said Mr. Thompson hastily. "It's not an order. We don't want to give you orders. . . . Take it easy, Jim."

Galt resumed his pacing. "The world is collapsing," said Taggart, his eyes following Galt irresistibly. "People are perishing—and it's you who could save them! Does it matter who's right or wrong? You should join us, even if you think we're wrong, you should sacrifice your mind to save them!"

"By what means will I then save them?"

"Who do you think you are?" cried Taggart.

Galt stopped. "You know it."

"You're an egoist!"

"I am."

"Do you realize what sort of egoist you are?"

"Do *you*?" asked Galt, looking straight at him

It was the slow withdrawal of Taggart's body into the depth of his armchair, while his eyes were holding Galt's, that made Mr. Thompson unaccountably afraid of the next moment.

"Say," Mr. Thompson interrupted in a brightly casual voice, "what sort of cigarette are you smoking?"

Galt turned to him and smiled. "I don't know."

"Where did you get it?"

"One of your guards brought me a package of them. He said some man asked him to give it to me as a present. . . . Don't worry," he added, "your boys have put it through every kind of test. There were no hidden messages. It was just a present from an anonymous admirer."

The cigarette between Galt's fingers bore the sign of the dollar.

James Taggart was no good at the job of persuasion, Mr. Thompson concluded. But Chick Morrison, whom he brought the next day, did no better.

"I . . . I'll just throw myself on your mercy, Mr. Galt," said Chick Morrison with a frantic smile. "You're right. I'll concede that you're right—and all I can appeal to is your pity. Deep down in my heart, I can't believe that you're a total egoist who feels no pity for the people." He pointed to a pile of papers he had spread on a table. "Here's a plea signed by ten thousand schoolchildren, begging you to join us and save them. Here's a plea from a home for the crippled. Here's a petition sent by the ministers of two hundred different faiths. Here's an appeal from the mothers of the country. Read them."

"Is this an order?"

"No!" cried Mr. Thompson. "It's not an order!"

Galt remained motionless, not extending his hand for the papers.

"These are just plain, ordinary people, Mr Galt," said Chick Morrison in a tone intended to project their abject humility. "They can't tell you what to do. They wouldn't know. They're merely begging you. They may be weak, helpless, blind, ignorant. But you, who are

so intelligent and strong, can't you take pity on them? Can't you help them?"

"By dropping my intelligence and following their blindness?"

"They may be wrong, but they don't know any better!"

"But I, who do, should obey them?"

"I can't argue, Mr. Galt. I'm just begging for your pity. They're suffering. I'm begging you to pity those who suffer. I'm . . . Mr. Galt," he asked, noticing that Galt was looking off at the distance beyond the window and that his eyes were suddenly implacable, "what's the matter? What are you thinking of?"

"Hank Rearden."

"Uh . . . why?"

"Did they feel any pity for Hank Rearden?"

"Oh, but that's different! He—"

"Shut up," said Galt evenly.

"I only—"

"Shut up!" snapped Mr. Thompson. "Don't mind him, Mr. Galt. He hasn't slept for two nights. He's scared out of his wits."

Dr. Floyd Ferris, next day, did not seem to be scared—but it was worse, thought Mr. Thompson. He observed that Galt remained silent and would not answer Ferris at all.

"It's the question of moral responsibility that you might not have studied sufficiently, Mr. Galt," Dr. Ferris was drawling in too airy, too forced a tone of casual informality. "You seem to have talked on the radio about nothing but sins of commission. But there are also the sins of omission to consider. To fail to save a life is as immoral as to murder. The consequences are the same—and since we just judge actions by their consequences, the moral responsibility is the same. . . . For instance, in view of the desperate shortage of food, it has been suggested that it might become necessary to issue a directive ordering that every third one of all children under the age of ten and of all adults over the age of sixty be put to death, to secure the survival of the rest. You wouldn't want this to happen, would you? You can prevent it. One word from you would prevent it. If you refuse and all those people are executed—it will be *your* fault and *your* moral responsibility!"

"You're crazy!" screamed Mr. Thompson, recovering from shock and leaping to his feet. "Nobody's ever suggested any such thing! Nobody's ever considered it! Please, Mr. Galt! Don't believe him! He doesn't mean it!"

"Oh yes, he does," said Galt. "Tell the bastard to look at me, then look in the mirror, then ask himself whether I would ever think that *my* moral stature is at the mercy of *his* actions."

"Get out of here!" cried Mr. Thompson, yanking Ferris to his feet. "Get out! Don't let me hear another squeak out of you!" He flung the door open and pushed Ferris at the startled face of a guard outside.

Turning to Galt, he spread his arms and let them drop with a gesture of drained helplessness. Galt's face was expressionless.

"Look," said Mr. Thompson pleadingly, "isn't there anybody who can talk to you?"