"Henry!" The gasp of indignation was at his choice of language, nothing more.

"Don't ever speak to me again about a job for Philip. I would not give him the job of a cinder sweeper. I would not allow him inside my mills. I want you to understand that, once and for all. You may try to help him in any way you wish, but don't ever let me see you thinking of my mills as a means to that end."

The wrinkles of her soft chin trickled into a shape resembling a sneer. "What are they, your mills—a holy temple of some kind?"

"Why . . . yes," he said softly, astonished at the thought.

"Don't you ever think of people and of your moral duties?"

"I don't know what it is that you choose to call morality. No, I don't think of people—except that if I gave a job to Philip, I wouldn't be able to face any competent man who needed work and deserved it."

She got up. Her head was drawn into her shoulders, and the righteous bitterness of her voice seemed to push the words upward at his tall, straight figure: "*That's* your cruelty, that's what's mean and selfish about you. If you loved your brother, you'd give him a job he didn't deserve, precisely because he didn't deserve it—*that* would be true love and kindness and brotherhood. Else what's love for? If a man *deserves* a job, there's no virtue in giving it to him. Virtue is the giving of the undeserved."

He was looking at her like a child at an unfamiliar nightmare, incredulity preventing it from becoming horror. "Mother," he said slowly, "you don't know what you're saying. I'm not able ever to despise you enough to believe that you mean it."

The look on her face astonished him more than all the rest: it was a look of defeat and yet of an odd, sly, cynical cunning, as if, for a moment, she held some worldly wisdom that mocked his innocence.

The memory of that look remained in his mind, like a warning signal telling him that he had glimpsed an issue which he had to understand. But he could not grapple with it, he could not force his mind to accept it as worthy of thought, he could find no clue except his dim uneasiness and his revulsion—and he had no time to give it, he could not think of it now, he was facing his next caller seated in front of his desk—he was listening to a man who pleaded for his life.

The man did not state it in such terms, but Rearden knew that that was the essence of the case. What the man put into words was only a plea for five hundred tons of steel.

He was Mr. Ward, of the Ward Harvester Company of Minnesota. It was an unpretentious company with an unblemished reputation, the kind of business concern that seldom grows large, but never fails. Mr. Ward represented the fourth generation of a family that had owned the plant and had given it the conscientious best of such ability as they possessed.

He was a man in his fifties, with a square, stolid face. Looking at him, one knew that he would consider it as indecent to let his face show suffering as to remove his clothes in public. He spoke in a dry, businesslike manner. He explained that he had always dealt, as his father had, with one of the small steel companies now taken over

by Orren Boyle's Associated Steel. He had waited for his last order of steel for a year. He had spent the last month struggling to obtain a personal interview with Rearden.

"I know that your mills are running at capacity, Mr. Rearden," he said, "and I know that you are not in a position to take care of new orders, what with your biggest, oldest customers having to wait their turn, you being the only decent--I mean, reliable—steel manufacturer left in the country. I don't know what reason to offer you as to why you should want to make an exception in my case. But there was nothing else for me to do, except close the doors of my plant for good, and I"--there was a slight break in his voice—"I can't quite see my way to closing the doors . . . as yet . . . so I thought I'd speak to you, even if I didn't have much chance . . . still, I had to try everything possible."

This was language that Rearden could understand. "I wish I could help you out," he said, "but this is the worst possible time for me, because of a very large, very special order that has to take precedence over everything."

"I know. But would you just give me a hearing, Mr. Rearden?"

"Sure."

"If it's a question of money, I'll pay anything you ask. If I could make it worth your while that way, why, charge me any extra you please, charge me double the regular price, only let me have the steel. I wouldn't care if I had to sell the harvester at a loss this year, just so I could keep the doors open. I've got enough, personally, to run at a loss for a couple of years, if necessary, just to hold out because, I figure, things can't go on this way much longer, conditions are bound to improve, they've got to or else we'll -" He did not finish. He said firmly, "They've got to."

"They will," said Rearden.

The thought of the John Galt Line ran through his mind like a harmony under the confident sound of his words. The John Galt Line was moving forward. The attacks on his Metal had ceased. He felt as if, miles apart across the country, he and Dagny Taggart now stood in empty space, their way cleared, free to finish the job. They'll leave us alone to do it, he thought. The words were like a battle hymn in his mind: They'll leave us alone.

"Our plant capacity is one thousand harvesters per year," said Mr. Ward. "Last year, we put out three hundred. I scraped the steel together from bankruptcy sales, and begging a few tons here and there from big companies, and just going around like a scavenger to all sorts of unlikely places--well, I won't bore you with that, only I never thought I'd live to see the time when I'd have to do business that way. And all the while Mr. Orren Boyle was swearing to me that he was going to deliver the steel next week. But whatever he managed to pour, it went to new customers of his, for some reason nobody would mention, only I heard it whispered that they were men with some sort of political pull. And now I can't even get to Mr. Boyle at all. He's in Washington, been there for over a month. And all his office tells me is just that they can't help it, because they can't get the ore."