whom you admire so much." He chuckled, looking off into the future.

"Jim," she asked, the sound of fear in her voice, telling him what the sound of his chuckle had been like, "why do you hate Hank Rearden?"

"I don't hate him!" He whirled to her, and his face, incredibly, looked anxious, almost frightened. "I never said I hated him. Don't worry, he'll approve of the plan. Everybody will. It's for everybody's good." He sounded as if he were pleading. She felt the dizzying certainty that he was lying, yet that the plea was sincere—as if he had a desperate need to reassure her, but not about the things he said.

She forced herself to smile. "Yes, Jim, of course," she answered, wondering what instinct in what impossible kind of chaos had made her say it as if it were *her* part to reassure him.

The look she saw on his face was almost a smile and almost of gratitude. "I had to tell you about it tonight. I had to tell you. I wanted you to know what tremendous issues I deal with. You always talk about my work, but you don't understand it at all, it's so much wider than you imagine. You think that running a railroad is a matter of tracklaying and fancy metals and getting trains there on time. But it's not. Any underling can do that. The real heart of a railroad is in Washington. My job is politics. Politics. Decisions made on a national scale, affecting everything, controlling everybody. A few words on paper, a directive—changing the life of every person in every nook, cranny and penthouse of this country!"

"Yes, Jim," she said, wishing to believe that he was, perhaps, a man of stature in the mysterious realm of Washington.

"You'll see," he said, pacing the room. "You think they're powerful—those giants of industry who're so clever with motors and furnaces? They'll be stopped! They'll be stripped! They'll be brought down! They'll be—" He noticed the way she was staring at him "It's not for ourselves," he snapped hastily, "it's for the people That's the difference between business and politics—we have no selfish ends in view, no private motives, we're not after profit, we don't spend our lives scrambling for money, we don't have to! That's why we're slandered and misunderstood by all the greedy profitchasers who can't conceive of a spiritual motive or a moral ideal or . . . We couldn't help it!" he cried suddenly, whirling to her "We had to have that plan! With everything falling to pieces and stopping, something had to be done! We had to stop them from stopping! We couldn't help it!"

His eyes were desperate; she did not know whether he was boasting or begging for forgiveness; she did not know whether this was triumph or terror. "Jim, don't you feel well? Maybe you've worked too hard and you're worn out and—"

"I've never felt better in my life!" he snapped, resuming his pacing. "You bet I've worked hard. My work is bigger than any job you can hope to imagine. It's above anything that grubbing mechanics, like Rearden and my sister, are doing. Whatever they do, I can undo it. Let them build a track—I can come and break it, just like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Just like breaking a spine!"

"You want to break spines?" she whispered, trembling.

"I haven't said that!" he screamed. "What's the matter with you? I haven't said it!"

"I'm sorry, Jim!" she gasped, shocked by her own words and by the terror in his eyes. "It's just that I don't understand, but . . . but I know I shouldn't bother you with questions when you're so tired"—she was struggling desperately to convince herself—"when you have so many things on your mind . . . such . . . such great things . . . things I can't even begin to think of . . ."

His shoulders sagged, relaxing. He approached her and dropped wearily down on his knees, slipping his arms around her. "You poor little fool," he said affectionately.

She held onto him, moved by something that felt like tenderness and almost like pity. But he raised his head to glance up at her face, and it seemed to her that the look she saw in his eyes was part-gratification, part-contempt—almost as if, by some unknown kind of sanction, she had absolved him and damned herself.

It was useless—she found in the days that followed—to tell herself that these things were beyond her understanding, that it was her duty to believe in him, that love was faith. Her doubt kept growing—doubt of his incomprehensible work and of his relation to the railroad. She wondered why it kept growing in direct proportion to her self-admonitions that faith was the duty she owed him. Then, one sleepless night, she realized that her effort to fulfill that duty consisted of turning away whenever people discussed his job, of refusing to look at newspaper mentions of Taggart Transcontinental, of slamming her mind shut against any evidence and every contradiction. She stopped, aghast, struck by the question What is it, then—faith versus truth? And realizing that part of her zeal to believe was her fear to know, she set out to learn the truth, with a cleaner, calmer sense of rightness than the effort as dutiful self-fraud had ever given her.

It did not take her long to learn The evasiveness of the Taggart executives, when she asked a few casual questions, the stale generalities of their answers, the strain of their manner at the mention of their boss, and their obvious reluctance to discuss him—told her nothing concrete, but gave her a feeling equivalent to knowing the worst. The railroad workers were more specific—the switchmen, the gatemen, the ticket sellers whom she drew into chance conversations in the Taggart Terminal and who did not know her. "Jim Taggart? That whining, sniveling, speech-making deadhead!" "Jimmy the President? Well, I'll tell you' he's the hobo on the gravy train." "The boss? Mr. Taggart? You mean *Miss* Taggart, don't you?"

It was Eddie Willers who told her the whole truth. She heard that he had known Jim since childhood, and she asked him to lunch with her. When she faced him at the table, when she saw the earnest, questioning directness of his eyes and the severely literal simplicity of his words, she dropped all attempts at casual prodding, she told him what she wanted to know and why, briefly, impersonally, not appealing for help or for pity, only for truth. He answered her in the same manner. He told her the whole story, quietly, impersonally,