the plan. We lost our best engineers, superintendents, foremen and highest-skilled workers. A man of self-respect doesn't turn into a milch cow for anybody. Some able fellows tried to stick it out, but they couldn't take it for long. We kept losing our men, they kept escaping from the factory like from a pest-hole—till we had nothing left except the men of need, but none of the men of ability.

"And the few of us who were still any good, but stayed on, were only those who had been there too long. In the old days, nobody ever quit the Twentieth Century—and, somehow, we couldn't make ourselves believe that it was gone. After a while, we couldn't quit, because no other employer would have us—for which I can't blame him. Nobody would deal with us in any way, no respectable person or firm. All the small shops, where we traded, started moving out of Starnesville fast—till we had nothing left but saloons, gambling joints and crooks who sold us trash at gouging prices. The alms we got kept falling, but the cost of our living went up. The list of the factory's needy kept stretching, but the list of its customers shrank. There was less and less income to divide among more and more people. In the old days, it used to be said that the Twentieth Century Motor trademark was as good as the karat mark on gold. I don't know what it was that the Starnes heirs thought, if they thought at all, but I suppose that like all social planners and like savages, they thought that this trademark was a magic stamp which did the trick by some sort of voodoo power and that it would keep them rich, as it had kept their father. Well, when our customers began to see that we never delivered an order on time and never put out a motor that didn't have something wrong with it—the magic stamp began to work the other way around: people wouldn't take a motor as a gift, if it was marked Twentieth Century. And it came to where our only customers were men who never paid and never meant to pay their bills. But Gerald Starnes, doped by his own publicity, got huffy and went around, with an air of moral superiority, demanding that businessmen place orders with us, not because our motors were good, but because we *needed* the orders so badly.

"By that time, a village half-wit could see what generations of professors had pretended not to notice. What good would our need do to a power plant when its generators stopped because of our defective engines? What good would it do to a man caught on an operating table when the electric light went out? What good would it do to the passenger of a plane when its motor failed in mid-air? And if they bought our product, not because of its merit, but because of our need, would that be the good, the right, the moral thing to do for the owner of that power plant, the surgeon in that hospital, the maker of that plane?

"Yet this was the moral law that the professors and leaders and thinkers had wanted to establish all over the earth. If this is what it did in a single small town where we all knew one another, do you care to think what it would do on a world scale? Do you care to imagine what it would be like, if you had to live and to work, when you're tied to all the disasters and all the malingering of the globe? To work—and whenever any men failed anywhere, it's you who

would have to make up for it. To work—with no chance to rise, with your meals and your clothes and your home and your pleasure depending on any swindle, any famine, any pestilence anywhere on earth. To work—with no chance for an extra ration, till the Cambodians have been fed and the Patagonians have been sent through college. To work—on a blank check held by every creature born, by men whom you'll never see, whose needs you'll never know, whose ability or laziness or sloppiness or fraud you have no way to learn and no right of question just to work and work and work—and leave it up to the Ivys and the Geralds of the world to decide whose stomach will consume the effort, the dreams and the days of your life. And *this* is the moral law to accept? *This*—a moral ideal?

"Well, we tried it—and we learned. Our agony took four years, from our first meeting to our last, and it ended the only way it could end: in bankruptcy. At our last meeting, Ivy Starnes was the one who tried to brazen it out. She made a short, nasty, snippy little speech in which she said that the plan had failed because the rest of the country had not accepted it, that a single community could not succeed in the midst of a selfish, greedy world—and that the plan was a noble ideal, but human nature was not good enough for it. A young boy—the one who had been punished for giving us a useful idea in our first year—got up, as we all sat silent, and walked straight to Ivy Starnes on the platform. He said nothing. He spat in her face. That was the end of the noble plan and of the Twentieth Century."

The man had spoken as if the burden of his years of silence had slipped suddenly out of his grasp. She knew that this was his tribute to her: he had shown no reaction to her kindness, he had seemed numbed to human value or human hope, but something within him had been reached and his response was this confession, this long, desperate cry of rebellion against injustice, held back for years, but breaking out in recognition of the first person he had met in whose hearing an appeal for justice would not be hopeless. It was as if the life he had been about to renounce were given back to him by the two essentials he needed: by his food and by the presence of a rational being.

"But what about John Galt?" she asked.

"Oh . . ." he said, remembering. "Oh, yes . . ."

"You were going to tell me why people started asking that question."

"Yes . . ." He was looking off, as if at some sight which he had studied for years, but which remained unchanged and unsolved; his face had an odd, questioning look of terror.

"You were going to tell me who was the John Galt they mean—if there ever was such a person."

"I hope there wasn't, ma'am. I mean, I hope that it's just a coincidence, just a sentence that hasn't any meaning."

"You had something in mind. What?"

"It was . . . it was something that happened at that first meeting at the Twentieth Century factory. Maybe that was the start of it, maybe not. I don't know . . . The meeting was held on a spring