answered, "do you think you're qualified to pass judgment on philosophers?" "I'm qualified to pass judgment on con men. I've seen enough of them to know one when I see him." "Now this is why I say that you'll never outgrow your background. If you had, you would have learned to appreciate Dr. Pritchett's philosophy." "What philosophy?" "If you don't understand it, I can't explain." She would not let him end the conversation on that favorite formula of his. "Jim," she said, "he's a phony, he and Balph Eubank and that whole gang of theirs—and I think you've been taken in by them." Instead of the anger she expected, she saw a brief flash of amusement in the lift of his eyelids. "That's what *you* think," he answered.

She felt an instant of terror at the first touch of a concept she had not known to be possible: What if Jim was *not* taken in by them? She could understand the phoniness of Dr. Pritchett, she thought—it was a racket that gave him an undeserved income; she could even admit the possibility, by now, that Jim might be a phony in his own business; what she could not hold inside her mind was the concept of Jim as a phony in a racket from which he gained nothing, an unpaid phony, an unvenal phony; the phoniness of a cardsharp or a con man seemed innocently wholesome by comparison. She could not conceive of his motive; she felt only that the headlight moving upon her had grown larger.

She could not remember by what steps, what accumulation of pain, first as small scratches of uneasiness, then as stabs of bewilderment, then as the chronic, nagging pull of fear, she had begun to doubt Jim's position on the railroad. It was his sudden, angry "so you don't trust me?" snapped in answer to her first, innocent questions that made her realize that she did not—when the doubt had not yet formed in her mind and she had fully expected that his answers would reassure her. She had learned, in the slums of her childhood, that honest people were never touchy about the matter of being trusted.

"I don't care to talk shop," was his answer whenever she mentioned the railroad. She tried to plead with him once. "Jim, you know what I think of your work and how much I admire you for it." "Oh, really? What is it you married, a man or a railroad president?" "I . . . I never thought of separating the two." "Well, it is not very flattering to me." She looked at him, baffled: she had thought it was. "I'd like to believe," he said, "that you love me for myself, and not for my railroad." "Oh God, Jim," she gasped, "you didn't think that I—!" "No," he said, with a sadly generous smile, "I didn't think that you married me for my money or my position. *I* have never doubted you." Realizing, in stunned confusion and in tortured fairness, that she might have given him ground to misinterpret her feeling, that she had forgotten how many bitter disappointments he must have suffered at the hands of fortune-hunting women, she could do nothing but shake her head and moan, "Oh, Jim, that's not what I meant!" He chuckled softly, as at a child, and slipped his arm around her. "Do you love me?" he asked. "Yes," she whispered. "Then you must have faith in me. Love is faith, you know. Don't you see that

I need it? I don't trust anyone around me. I have nothing but enemies, I am very lonely. Don't you know that I need you?"

The thing that made her pace her room—hours later, in tortured restlessness—was that she wished desperately to believe him and did not believe a word of it, yet knew that it was true.

It was true, but not in the manner he implied, not in any manner or meaning she could ever hope to grasp. It was true that he needed her, but the nature of his need kept slipping past her every effort to define it. She did not know what he wanted of her. It was not flattery that he wanted, she had seen him listening to the obsequious compliments of liars, listening with a look of resentful inertness—almost the look of a drug addict at a dose inadequate to rouse him. But she had seen him look at her as if he were waiting for some reviving shot and, at times, as if he were begging. She had seen a flicker of life in his eyes whenever she granted him some sign of admiration—yet a burst of anger was his answer, whenever she named a reason for admiring him. He seemed to want her to consider him great, but never dare ascribe any specific content to his greatness.

She did not understand the night, in mid-April, when he returned from a trip to Washington. "Hi, kid!" he said loudly, dropping a sheaf of lilac into her arms. "Happy days are here again! Just saw those flowers and thought of you. Spring is coming, baby!"

He poured himself a drink and paced the room, talking with too light, too brash a manner of gaiety. There was a feverish sparkle in his eyes, and his voice seemed shredded by some unnatural excitement. She began to wonder whether he was elated or crushed.

"I know what it is that they're planning!" he said suddenly, without transition, and she glanced up at him swiftly: she knew the sound of one of his inner explosions. "There's not a dozen people in the whole country who know it, but I do! The top boys are keeping it secret till they're ready to spring it on the nation. Will it surprise a lot of people! Will it knock them flat! A lot of people? Hell, every single person in this country! It will affect every single person. That's how important it is."

"Affect—how, Jim?"

"It will *affect* them! And they don't know what's coming, but I do. There they sit tonight"—he waved at the lighted windows of the city—"making plans, counting their money, hugging their children or their dreams, and they don't know, but I do, that all of it will be struck, stopped, changed!"

"Changed—for the worse or the better?"

"For the better, of course," he answered impatiently, as if it were irrelevant; his voice seemed to lose its fire and to slip into the fraudulent sound of duty. "It's a plan to save the country, to stop our economic decline, to hold things still, to achieve stability and security."

"What plan?"

"I can't tell you. It's secret. Top secret. You have no idea how many people would like to know it. There's no industrialist who wouldn't give a dozen of his best furnaces for just one hint of warning, which he's not going to get! Like Hank Rearden, for instance,