ity, they went by a man's record: I had a good record. But it was just two weeks after I got the job that Lawrence Hammond quit. He quit and disappeared. They closed the plant. Afterwards, there was a citizens' committee that reopened it. I got called back. But five days was all it lasted. They started layoffs just about at once. By seniority. So I had to go. I heard they lasted for about three months, the citizens' committee. Then they had to close the plant for good."

"Where did you work before that?"

"Just about in every Eastern state, ma'am. But it was never more than a month or two. The plants kept closing."

"Did that happen on every job you've held?"

He glanced at her, as if he understood her question. "No, ma'am," he answered and, for the first time, she caught a faint echo of pride in his voice. "The first job I had, I held it for twenty years. Not the same job, but the same place, I mean—I got to be shop foreman. That was twelve years ago. Then the owner of the plant died, and the heirs who took it over, ran it into the ground. Times were bad then, but it was since then that things started going to pieces everywhere faster and faster. Since then, it seems like anywhere I turned—the place cracked and went. At first, we thought it was only one state or another. A lot of us thought that Colorado would last. But it went, too. Anything you tried, anything you touched—it fell. Anywhere you looked, work was stopping the factories were stopping—the machines were stopping—" he added slowly, in a whisper, as if seeing some secret terror of his own, "*the motors . . . were . . . stopping.*" His voice rose: "Oh God, who is—" and broke off

"—John Galt?" she asked

"Yes," he said, and shook his head as if to dispel some vision, "only I don't like to say that."

"I don't, either. I wish I knew why people are saying it and who started it."

"That's it, ma'am. That's what I'm afraid of. It might have been me who started it."

"*What?*"

"Me or about six thousand others. We might have. I think we did. I hope we're wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there was something that happened at that plant where I worked for twenty years. It was when the old man died and his heirs took over. There were three of them, two sons and a daughter, and they brought a new plan to run the factory. They let us vote on it, too, and everybody—almost everybody—voted for it. We didn't know. We thought it was good. No, that's not true, either. We thought that we were supposed to think it was good. The plan was that everybody in the factory would work according to his ability, but would be paid according to his need. We—what's the matter, ma'am? Why do you look like that?"

"What was the name of the factory?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

"The Twentieth Century Motor Company, ma'am, of Starnesville, Wisconsin."

"Go on."

"We voted for that plan at a big meeting, with all of us present, six thousand of us, everybody that worked in the factory. The Starnes heirs made long speeches about it, and it wasn't too clear, but nobody asked any questions. None of us knew just how the plan would work, but every one of us thought that the next fellow knew it. And if anybody had doubts, he felt guilty and kept his mouth shut—because they made it sound like anyone who'd oppose the plan was a child-killer at heart and less than a human being. They told us that this plan would achieve a noble ideal. Well, how were we to know otherwise? Hadn't we heard it all our lives—from our parents and our schoolteachers and our ministers, and in every newspaper we ever read and every movie and every public speech? Hadn't we always been told that this was righteous and just? Well, maybe there's some excuse for what we did at that meeting. Still, we voted for the plan—and what we got, we had it coming to us. You know, ma'am, we are marked men, in a way, those of us who lived through the four years of that plan in the Twentieth Century factory. What is it that hell is supposed to be? Evil—plain, naked, smirking evil, isn't it? Well, that's what we saw and helped to make—and I think we're damned, every one of us, and maybe we'll never be forgiven . . .

"Do you know how it worked, that plan, and what it did to people? Try pouring water into a tank where there's a pipe at the bottom draining it out faster than you pour it, and each bucket you bring breaks that pipe an inch wider, and the harder you work the more is demanded of you, and you stand slinging buckets forty hours a week, then forty-eight, then fifty-six—for your neighbor's supper—for his wife's operation—for his child's measles—for his mother's wheel chair—for his uncle's shirt—for his nephew's schooling—for the baby next door—for the baby to be born—for anyone anywhere around you—it's theirs to receive, from diapers to dentures—and yours to work, from sunup to sundown, month after month, year after year, with nothing to show for it but your sweat, with nothing in sight for you but their pleasure, for the whole of your life, without rest, without hope without end. . . . From each according to his ability, to each according to his need. . . .

"We're all one big family, they told us, we're all in this together But you don't stand, working an acetylene torch ten hours a day—together, and you don't all get a bellyache—together. What's whose ability and which of whose needs comes first? When it's all one pot, you can't let any man decide what his own needs are, can you? If you did, he might claim that he needs a yacht—and if his feelings is all you have to go by, he might prove it, too. Why not? If it's not right for me to own a car until I've worked myself into a hospital ward, earning a car for every loafer and every naked savage on earth—why can't he demand a yacht from me, too, if I still have the ability not to have collapsed? No? He can't? Then why can he demand that I go without cream for my coffee until he's replastered his living room? . . . Oh well . . . Well, anyway, it was decided that nobody had the right to judge his own need or ability. We *voted* on it. Yes, ma'am, we voted on it in a public meeting twice a year. How