There's one motor he's not going to stop, she thought . . . he's not going to stop . . . he's not going to stop . . . He's not going to stop, she thought—awakening with a jolt, jerking her head off the pillow. The wheels had stopped.

For a moment, she remained still, trying to grasp the peculiar stillness around her. It felt like the impossible attempt to create a sensory image of non-existence. There were no attributes of reality to perceive, nothing but their absence: no sound, as if she were alone on the train—no motion, as if this were not a train, but a room in a building—no light, as if this were neither train nor room, but space without objects—no sign of violence or physical disaster, as if this were the state where disaster is no longer possible.

In the moment when she grasped the nature of the stillness, her body sprang upright with a single curve of motion, immediate and violent like a cry of rebellion. The loud screech of the window shade went like a knife-cut through the silence, as she threw the shade upward. There was nothing outside but anonymous stretches of prairie; a strong wind was breaking the clouds, and a shaft of moonlight fell through, but it fell upon plains that seemed as dead as those from which it came.

The sweep of her hand pressed the light switch and the bell to summon the porter. The electric light came on and brought her back to a rational world. She glanced at her watch: it was a few minutes past midnight. She looked out of the rear window: the track went off in a straight line and, at the prescribed distance, she saw the red lanterns left on the ground, placed conscientiously to protect the rear of the train. The sight seemed reassuring.

She pressed the porter's bell once more. She waited. She went to the vestibule, unlocked the door and leaned out to look down the line of the train. A few windows were lighted in the long, tapering band of steel, but she saw no figures, no sign of human activity. She slammed the door, came back and started to dress, her movements suddenly calm and swift.

No one came to answer her bell. When she hastened across to the next car, she felt no fear, no uncertainty, no despair, nothing but the urgency of action.

There was no porter in the cubbyhole of the next car, no porter in the car beyond. She hurried down the narrow passageways, meeting no one. But a few compartment doors were open. The passengers sat inside, dressed or half-dressed, silently as if waiting. They watched her rush by with oddly furtive glances, as if they knew what she was after, as they had expected someone to come and to face what they had not faced. She went on, running down the spinal cord of a dead train, noting the peculiar combination of lighted compartments, open doors and empty passages: no one had ventured to step out. No one had wanted to ask the first question.

She ran through the train's only coach, where some passengers slept in contorted poses of exhaustion, while others, awake and still, sat hunched, like animals waiting for a blow, making no move to avert it.

In the vestibule of the coach, she stopped. She saw a man, who

had unlocked the door and was leaning out, looking inquiringly ahead through the darkness, ready to step off. He turned at the sound of her approach. She recognized his face: It was Owen Kellogg, the man who had rejected the future she had once offered him.

"Kellogg!" she gasped, the sound of laughter in her voice like a cry of relief at the sudden sight of a man in a desert.

"Hello, Miss Taggart," he answered, with an astonished smile that held a touch of incredulous pleasure—and of wistfulness. "I didn't know you were aboard."

"Come on," she ordered, as if he were still an employee of the railroad. "I think we're on a frozen train."

"We are," he said, and followed her with prompt, disciplined obedience.

No explanations were necessary. It was as if, in unspoken understanding, they were answering a call to duty—and it seemed natural that of the hundreds aboard, it was the two of them who should be partners-in-danger.

"Any idea how long we've been standing?" she asked, as they hurried on through the next car.

"No," he said. "We were standing when I woke up."

They went the length of the train, finding no porters, no waiters in the diner, no brakemen, no conductor. They glanced at each other once in a while, but kept silent. They knew the stories of abandoned trains, of the crews that vanished in sudden bursts of rebellion against serfdom.

They got off at the end of the train, with no motion around them save the wind on their faces, and they climbed swiftly aboard the engine. The engine's headlight was on, stretching like an accusing arm into the void of the night. The engine's cab was empty.

Her cry of desperate triumph broke out in answer to the shock of the sight: "Good for them! They're human beings!"

She stopped, aghast, as at the cry of a stranger. She noticed that Kellogg stood watching her curiously, with the faint hint of a smile.

It was an old steam engine, the best that the railroad had been able to provide for the Comet. The fire was banked in the grates, the steam gauge was low, and in the great windshield before them the headlight fell upon a band of ties that should have been running to meet them, but lay still instead, like a ladder's steps, counted, numbered and ended.

She reached for the logbook and looked at the names of the train's last crew. The engineer had been Pat Logan.

Her head dropped slowly, and she closed her eyes. She thought of the first run on a green-blue track, that must have been in Pat Logan's mind—as it was now in hers—through the silent hours of his last run on any rail.

"Miss Taggart?" said Owen Kellogg softly.

She jerked her head up. "Yes," she said, "yes . . . Well"—her voice had no color except the metallic tinge of decision—"we'll have to get to a phone and call for another crew." She glanced at her watch. "At the rate we were running, I think we must be about eight miles from the Oklahoma state line. I believe Bradshaw is this road's