seemed to her that through the rapid, running clatter of some futile stampede to escape, the beat of the accented knocks was like the steps of an enemy moving toward some inexorable purpose.

She had never experienced it before, this sense of apprehension at the sight of a prairie, this feeling that the rail was only a fragile thread stretched across an enormous emptiness, like a worn nerve ready to break. She had never expected that she, who had felt as if she were the motive power aboard a train, would now sit wishing, like a child or a savage, that this train would move, that it would not stop, that it would get her there on time—wishing it, not like an act of will, but like a plea to a dark unknown.

She thought of what a difference one month had made. She had seen it in the faces of the men at the stations. The track workers, the switchmen, the yardmen, who had always greeted her, anywhere along the line, their cheerful grins boasting that they knew who she was—had now looked at her stonily, turning away, their faces wary and closed. She had wanted to cry to them in apology, "It's not I who've done it to you!"—then had remembered that she had accepted it and that they now had the right to hate her, that she was both a slave and a driver of slaves, and so was every human being in the country, and hatred was the only thing that men could now feel for one another.

She had found reassurance, for two days, in the sight of the cities moving past her window—the factories, the bridges, the electric signs, the billboards pressing down upon the roofs of homes—the crowded, grimy, active, living conflux of the industrial East.

But the cities had been left behind. The train was now diving into the prairies of Nebraska, the rattle of its couplers sounding as if it were shivering with cold: She saw lonely shapes that had been farmhouses in the vacant stretches that had been fields. But the great burst of energy, in the East, generations ago, had splattered bright trickles to run through the emptiness; some were gone, but some still lived. She was startled when the lights of a small town swept across her car and, vanishing, left it darker than it had been before. She would not move to turn on the light. She sat still, watching the rare towns. Whenever an electric beam went flashing briefly at her face, it was like a moment's greeting.

She saw them as they went by, written on the walls of modest structures, over sooted roofs, down slender smokestacks, on the curves of tanks: Reynolds Harvesters—Macey Cement—Quinlan & Jones Pressed Alfalfa—Home of the Crawford Mattress—Benjamin Wylie Grain and Feed—words raised like flags to the empty darkness of the sky, the motionless forms of movement, of effort, of courage, of hope, the monuments to how much had been achieved on the edge of nature's void by men who had once been free to achieve—she saw the homes built in scattered privacy, the small shops, the wide streets with electric lighting, like a few luminous strokes criss-crossed on the black sheet of the wastelands—she saw the ghosts between, the remnants of towns, the skeletons of factories with crumbling smokestacks, the corpses of shops with broken panes, the slanting poles with shreds of wire—she saw a sudden blaze, the rare sight

of a gas station, a glittering white island of glass and metal under the huge black weight of space and sky—she saw an ice-cream cone made of radiant tubing, hanging above the corner of a street, and a battered car being parked below, with a young boy at the wheel and a girl stepping out, her white dress blowing in the summer wind—she shuddered for the two of them, thinking: I can't look at you, I who know what it has taken to give you your youth, to give you this evening, this car and the ice-cream cone you're going to buy for a quarter—she saw, on the edge beyond a town, a building glowing with tiers of pale blue light, the industrial light she loved, with the silhouettes of machines in its windows and a billboard in the darkness above its roof—and suddenly her head fell on her arm, and she sat shaking, crying soundlessly to the night, to herself, to whatever was human in any living being: Don't let it go! . . . Don't let it go! . . .

She jumped to her feet and snapped on the light. She stood still, fighting to regain control, knowing that such moments were her greatest danger. The lights of the town were past, her window was now an empty rectangle, and she heard, in the silence, the progression of the fourth knocks, the steps of the enemy moving on, not to be hastened or stopped.

In desperate need of the sight of some living activity, she decided she would not order dinner in her car, but would go to the diner. As if stressing and mocking her loneliness, a voice came back to her mind: "But you would not run trains if they were empty." Forget it!—she told herself angrily, walking hastily to the door of her car.

She was astonished, approaching her vestibule, to hear the sound of voices close by. As she pulled the door open, she heard a shout: "Get off, God damn you!"

An aging tramp had taken refuge in the corner of her vestibule. He sat on the floor, his posture suggesting that he had no strength left to stand up or to care about being caught. He was looking at the conductor, his eyes observant, fully conscious, but devoid of any reaction. The train was slowing down for a bad stretch of track, the conductor had opened the door to a cold gust of wind, and was waving at the speeding black void, ordering, "Get going! Get off as you got on or I'll kick you off head first!"

There was no astonishment in the tramp's face, no protest, no anger, no hope, he looked as if he had long since abandoned any judgment of any human action. He moved obediently to rise, his hand groping upward along the rivets of the car's wall. She saw him glance at her and glance away, as if she were merely another inanimate fixture of the train. He did not seem to be aware of her person, any more than of his own, he was indifferently ready to comply with an order which, in his condition, meant certain death.

She glanced at the conductor. She saw nothing in his face except the blind malevolence of pain, of some long-repressed anger that broke out upon the first object available, almost without consciousness of the object's identity. The two men were not human beings to each other any longer.

The tramp's suit was a mass of careful patches on a cloth so stiff and shiny with wear that one expected it to crack like glass