he had said, "If I could find the right man, I'd buy that mine for him tomorrow morning and set him up to work it."

The next day, when they were driving west and south, toward the plains of Illinois, he had said suddenly, after a long silence, "No, I'll have to wait till they junk the Bill. The man who could work that mine wouldn't need me to teach him. The man who'd need me, wouldn't be worth a damn."

They could speak of their work, as they always had, with full confidence in being understood. But they never spoke of each other. He acted as if their passionate intimacy were a nameless physical fact, not to be identified in the communication between two minds. Each night, it was as if she lay in the arms of a stranger who let her see every shudder of sensation that ran through his body, but would never permit her to know whether the shocks reached any answering tremor within him. She lay naked at his side, but on her wrist there was the bracelet of Rearden Metal.

She knew that he hated the ordeal of signing the "Mr. and Mrs. Smith" on the registers of squalid roadside hotels. There were evenings when she noticed the faint contraction of anger in the tightness of his mouth, as he signed the expected names of the expected fraud, anger at those who made fraud necessary. She noticed, indifferently, the air of knowing slyness in the manner of the hotel clerks, which seemed to suggest that guests and clerks alike were accomplices in a shameful guilt the guilt of seeking pleasure. But she knew that it did not matter to him when they were alone, when he held her against him for a moment and she saw his eyes look alive and guiltless.

They drove through small towns, through obscure side roads, through the kind of places they had not seen for years. She felt uneasiness at the sight of the towns Days passed before she realized what it was that she missed most: a glimpse of fresh paint. The houses stood like men in unpressed suits, who had lost the desire to stand straight; the cornices were like sagging shoulders, the crooked porch steps like torn hem lines, the broken windows like patches, mended with clapboard. The people in the streets stared at the new car, not as one stares at a rare sight, but as if the glittering black shape were an impossible vision from another world There were few vehicles in the streets and too many of them were horsedrawn. She had forgotten the literal shape and usage of horsepower; she did not like to see its return.

She did not laugh, that day at the grade crossing, when Rearden chuckled, pointing, and she saw the train of a small local railroad come tottering from behind a hill, drawn by an ancient locomotive that coughed black smoke through a tall stack.

"Oh God, Hank, it's not funny!"

"I know," he said.

They were seventy miles and an hour away from it, when she said, "Hank, do you see the Taggart Comet being pulled across the continent by a coal-burner of that kind?"

"What's the matter with you? Pull yourself together."

"I'm sorry . . . It's just that I keep thinking it won't be any use,

all my new track and all your new furnaces, if we don't find someone able to produce Diesel engines. If we don't find him fast."

"Ted Nielsen of Colorado is your man."

"Yes, if he finds a way to open his new plant. He's sunk more money than he should into the bonds of the John Galt Line."

"That's turned out to be a pretty profitable investment, hasn't it?"

"Yes, but it's held him up. Now he's ready to go ahead, but he can't find the tools. There are no machine tools to buy, not anywhere, not at any price. He's getting nothing but promises and delays. He's combing the country, looking for old junk to reclaim from closed factories. If he doesn't start soon—"

"He will. Who's going to stop him now?"

"Hank," she said suddenly, "could we go to a place I'd like to see?"

"Sure. Anywhere. Which place?"

"It's in Wisconsin. There used to be a great motor company there, in my father's time. We had a branch line serving it, but we closed the line—about seven years ago—when they closed the factory. I think it's one of those blighted areas now. Maybe there's still some machinery left there that Ted Nielsen could use. It might have been overlooked—the place is forgotten and there's no transportation to it at all."

"I'll find it. What was the name of the factory?"

"The Twentieth Century Motor Company."

"Oh, of course! That was one of the best motor firms in my youth, perhaps the best. I seem to remember that there was something odd about the way it went out of business . . . can't recall what it was."

It took them three days of inquiries, but they found the bleached, abandoned road—and now they were driving through the yellow leaves that glittered like a sea of gold coins, to the Twentieth Century Motor Company.

"Hank, what if anything happens to Ted Nielsen?" she asked suddenly, as they drove in silence.

"Why should anything happen to him?"

"I don't know, but . . . well, there was Dwight Sanders. He vanished. United Locomotives is done for now. And the other plants are in no condition to produce Diesels. I've stopped listening to promises. And . . . and of what use is a railroad without motive power?"

"Of what use is anything, for that matter, without it?"

The leaves sparkled, swaying in the wind. They spread for miles, from grass to brush to trees, with the motion and all the colors of fire: they seemed to celebrate an accomplished purpose, burning in unchecked, untouched abundance.

Rearden smiled. "There's something to be said for the wilderness. I'm beginning to like it. New country that nobody's discovered." She nodded gaily. "It's good soil—look at the way things grow. I'd clear that brush and I'd build a—"

And then they stopped smiling. The corpse they saw in the weeds by the roadside was a rusty cylinder with bits of glass—the remnant of a gas-station pump.