spring. A net of moisture hung in the air, and she felt an icy pinprick on her face once in a while, which was neither a raindrop nor a snowflake. The weather seemed afraid to take a stand and clung noncommittally to some sort of road's middle; Board of Directors' weather, she thought. The light seemed drained and she could not tell whether this was the afternoon or the evening of March 31. But she was very certain that it was March 31; that was a certainty not to be escaped

She had come to Colorado with Hank Rearden, to buy whatever machinery could still be found in the closed factories. It had been like a hurried search through the sinking hulk of a great ship before it was to vanish out of reach. They could have given the task to employees, but they had come, both prompted by the same unconfessed motive: they could not resist the desire to attend the run of the last train, as one cannot resist the desire to give the last salute by attending a funeral, even while knowing that it is only an act of self-torture.

They had been buying machinery from doubtful owners in sales of dubious legality, since nobody could tell who had the right to dispose of the great, dead properties, and nobody would come to challenge the transactions. They had bought everything that could be moved from the gutted plant of Nielsen Motors. Ted Nielsen had quit and vanished, a week after the announcement that the Line was to be closed.

She had felt like a scavenger, but the activity of the hunt had made her able to bear these past few days. When she had found that three empty hours remained before the departure of the last train, she had gone to walk through the countryside, to escape the stillness of the town. She had walked at random through twisting mountain trails, alone among rocks and snow, trying to substitute motion for thought, knowing that she had to get through this day without thinking of the summer when she had ridden the engine of the first train. But she found herself walking back along the roadbed of the John Galt Line—and she knew that she had intended it, that she had gone out for that purpose.

It was a spur track which had already been dismembered. There were no signal lights, no switches, no telephone wires, nothing but a long band of wooden strips on the ground—a chain of ties without rail, like the remnant of a spine—and, as its lonely guardian, at an abandoned grade crossing, a pole with slanted arms saying: "Stop. Look. Listen."

An early darkness mixed with fog was slipping down to fill the valleys, when she came upon the factory. There was an inscription high on the lustrous tile of its front wall: "Roger Marsh. Electrical Appliances." The man who had wanted to chain himself to his desk in order not to leave this, she thought. The building stood intact, like a corpse in that instant when its eyes have just closed and one still waits to see them open again. She felt that the lights would flare up at any moment behind the great sheets of windows, under the long, flat roofs. Then she saw one broken pane, pierced by a stone for some young moron's enjoyment—and she saw the tall, dry stem

of a single weed rising from the steps of the main entrance. Hit by a sudden, blinding hatred, in rebellion against the weed's impertinence, knowing of what enemy this was the scout, she ran forward, she fell on her knees and jerked the weed up by its roots. Then, kneeling on the steps of a closed factory, looking at the vast silence of mountains, brush and dusk, she thought: What do you think you're doing?

It was almost dark when she reached the end of the ties that led her back to the town of Marshville. Marshville had been the end of the Line for months past; service to Wyatt Junction had been discontinued long ago; Dr. Ferris' Reclamation Project had been abandoned this winter.

The street lights were on, and they hung in mid-air at the intersections, in a long, diminishing line of yellow globes over the empty streets of Marshville. All the better homes were closed—the neat, sturdy houses of modest cost, well built and well kept; there were faded "For Sale" signs on their lawns. But she saw lights in the windows of the cheap, garish structures that had acquired, within a few years, the slovenly dilapidation of slum hovels; the homes of people who had not moved, the people who never looked beyond the span of one week. She saw a large new television set in the lighted room of a house with a sagging roof and cracking walls. She wondered how long they expected the electric power companies of Colorado to remain in existence. Then she shook her head: those people had never known that power companies existed.

The main street of Marshville was lined by the black windows of shops out of business. All the luxury stores are gone—she thought, looking at their signs; and then she shuddered, realizing what things she now called luxury, realizing to what extent and in what manner those things, once available to the poorest, had been luxuries: Dry Cleaning—Electrical Appliances—Gas Station—Drug Store—Five and Ten. The only ones left open were grocery stores and saloons.

The platform of the railroad station was crowded. The glaring arc lights seemed to pick it out of the mountains, to isolate and focus it, like a small stage on which every movement was naked to the sight of the unseen tiers rising in the vast, encircling night. People were carting luggage, bundling their children, haggling at ticket windows, the stifled panic of their manner suggesting that what they really wanted to do was to fall down on the ground and scream with terror. Their terror had the evasive quality of guilt: it was not the fear that comes from understanding, but from the refusal to understand.

The last train stood at the platform, its windows a long, lone streak of light. The steam of the locomotive, gasping tensely through the wheels, did not have its usual joyous sound of energy released for a sprint; it had the sound of a panting breath that one dreads to hear and dreads more to stop hearing. Far at the end of the lighted windows, she saw the small red dot of a lantern attached to her private car. Beyond the lantern, there was nothing but a black void.

The train was loaded to capacity, and the shrill notes of hysteria in the confusion of voices were the pleas for space in vestibules and aisles. Some people were not leaving, but stood in vapid curiosity, watching the show; they had come, as if knowing that this was the