

right, but I don't believe it. I keep thinking that insanity is a state where a person can't tell what's real. Well, what's real now is insane—and if I accepted it as real, I'd have to lose my mind, wouldn't I? . . . I go on working and I keep telling myself that this is Taggart Transcontinental. I keep waiting for her—to come back—for the door to open at any moment and—oh God, I'm not supposed to say that! . . . What? You knew it? You knew that she's gone? . . . They're keeping it secret. But I guess everybody knows it, only nobody is supposed to say it. They're telling people that she's away on a leave of absence. She's still listed as our Vice-President in Charge of Operation. I think Jim and I are the only ones who know that she has resigned for good. Jim is scared to death that his friends in Washington will take it out on him, if it becomes known that she's quit. It's supposed to be disastrous for public morale, if any prominent person quits, and Jim doesn't want them to know that he's got a deserter right in his own family. . . . But that's not all. Jim is scared that the stockholders, the employees and whoever we do business with, will lose the last of their confidence in Taggart Transcontinental if they learn that she's gone. Confidence! You'd think that it wouldn't matter now, since there's nothing any of them can do about it. And yet Jim knows that we have to preserve some semblance of the greatness that Taggart Transcontinental once stood for. And he knows that the last of it went with her. . . . No, they don't know where she is. . . . Yes, I do, but I won't tell them. I'm the only one who knows. . . . Oh, yes, they've been trying to find out. They've tried to pump me in every way they could think of, but it's no use. I won't tell anyone. . . . You should see the trained seal that we now have in her place—our new Operating Vice-President. Oh sure, we have one—that is, we have and we haven't. It's like everything they do today—it is and it ain't, at the same time. His name is Clifton Locey—he's from Jim's personal staff—a bright, progressive young man of forty-seven and a friend of Jim's. He's only supposed to be pinch-hitting for her, but he sits in her office and we all know that that's the new Operating Vice-President. He gives the orders—that is, he sees to it that he's never caught actually giving an order. He works very hard at making sure that no decision can ever be pinned down on him, so that he won't be blamed for anything. You see, his purpose is not to operate a railroad, but to hold a job. He doesn't want to run trains—he wants to please Jim. He doesn't give a damn whether there's a single train moving or not, so long as he can make a good impression on Jim and on the boys in Washington. So far, Mr. Clifton Locey has managed to frame up two men: a young third assistant, for not relaying an order which Mr. Locey had never given—and the freight manager, for issuing an order which Mr. Locey *did* give, only the freight manager couldn't prove it. Both men were fired, officially, by ruling of the Unification Board. . . . When things go well—which is never longer than half an hour—Mr. Locey makes it a point to remind us that 'these are not the days of Miss Taggart.' At the first sign of trouble, he calls me into his office and asks me—casually, in the midst of the most irrelevant drivel—what Miss Taggart used to do in such an emergency. I tell him, whenever

I can. I tell myself that it's Taggart Transcontinental, and . . . and there's thousands of lives in dozens of trains that hang on our decisions. Between emergencies, Mr. Locey goes out of his way to be rude to me—that's so I wouldn't think that he needs me. He's made it a point to change everything she used to do, in every respect that doesn't matter, but he's damn cautious not to change anything that matters. The only trouble is that he can't always tell which is which. . . . On his first day in her office, he told me that it wasn't a good idea to have a picture of Nat Taggart on the wall—'Nat Taggart,' he said, 'belongs to a dark past, to the age of selfish greed, he is not exactly a symbol of our modern, progressive policies, so it could make a bad impression, people could identify me with him.' 'No, they couldn't,' I said—but I took the picture off his wall. . . . What? . . . No, she doesn't know any of it. I haven't communicated with her. Not once. She told me not to. . . . Last week, I almost quit. It was over Chick's Special. Mr. Chick Morrison of Washington, whoever the hell he is, has gone on a speaking tour of the whole country—to speak about the directive and build up the people's morale, as things are getting to be pretty wild everywhere. He demanded a special train, for himself and party—a sleeper, a parlor car and a diner with barroom and lounge. The Unification Board gave him permission to travel at a hundred miles an hour—by reason, the ruling said, of this being a non-profit journey. Well, so it is. It's just a journey to talk people into continuing to break their backs at making profits in order to support men who are superior by reason of not making any. Well, our trouble came when Mr. Chick Morrison demanded a Diesel engine for his train. We had none to give him. Every Diesel we own is out on the road, pulling the Comet and the transcontinental freights, and there wasn't a spare one anywhere on the system, except—well, that was an exception I wasn't going to mention to Mr. Clifton Locey. Mr. Locey raised the roof, screaming that come hell or high water we couldn't refuse a demand of Mr. Chick Morrison. I don't know what damn fool finally told him about the extra Diesel that was kept at Winston, Colorado, at the mouth of the tunnel. You know the way our Diesels break down nowadays, they're all breathing their last—so you can understand why that extra Diesel had to be kept at the tunnel. I explained it to Mr. Locey. I threatened him. I pleaded. I told him that she had made it our strictest rule that Winston Station was never to be left without an extra Diesel. He told me to remember that he was not Miss Taggart—as if I could ever forget it!—and that the rule was nonsense, because nothing had happened all these years, so Winston could do without a Diesel for a couple of months, and he wasn't going to worry about some theoretical disaster in the future when we were up against the very real, practical, immediate disaster of getting Mr. Chick Morrison angry at us. Well, Chick's Special got the Diesel. The superintendent of the Colorado Division quit. Mr. Locey gave that job to a friend of his own. I wanted to quit. I had never wanted to so badly. But I didn't. . . . No, I haven't heard from her. I haven't heard a word since she left. Why do you keep questioning me about her? Forget it. She won't be back. . . . I don't know what it is that